SALES SPARK IN THE CAR PARK

Recovery Solutions and Maximising the Car Park

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In June 2021, Scala issued the retail benchmarking report, **Recovery Solutions and Store Strategies.** Produced in partnership with WBR Insights, the report features survey responses from 100 retail brands based across Europe. Looking at the areas of investment focus for retail brands as well as strategies for retail recovery, the report covers a variety of topics including store reconfiguration, deployment of technology, attitudes toward omnichannel and optimising the car park. This short solution report uses data and expert commentary from *Recovery Solutions and Store Strategies* to explore digital solutions which could be applied to a key topic highlighted in the larger piece of research. The full retail benchmarking report is available for download. Other short solution reports, one exploring the future of store layout and the other looking at the ways in which sensors and signage can create a competitive customer experience, are also available.

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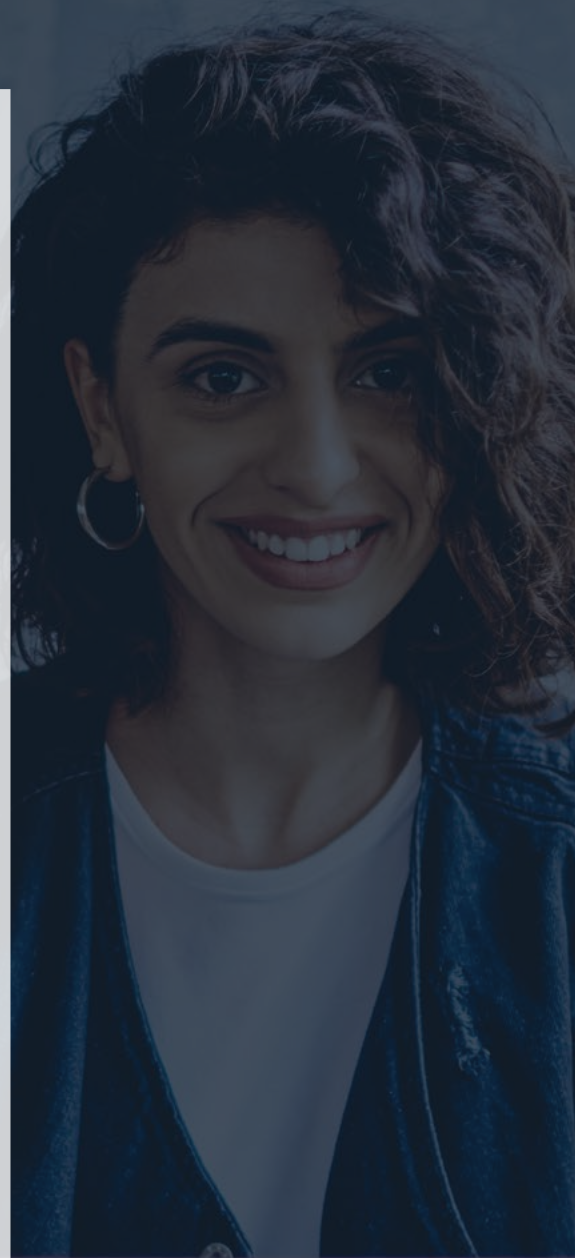
> *"If the retailer has a car park, I strongly encourage them to start thinking (if not already) about leveraging the space to offer fulfilment or pick up offerings before losing too many customers to the competition."*
>
> — Pavan Pidugu,
> Chief Technology Officer, FMCSA,
> U.S. Department of Transportation,
> former Director of Digital Customer & Omnichannel
> Experience, Walmart International

In our 2021 retail benchmarking report, *Recovery Solutions and Store Strategies*, of the 100 brands questioned, only 30 were considering using their car park or a nearby car park as a potential space for sales, collections, fulfilment or returns. Of those who are looking to expand the use of their car park, 84% believe that the car park is an important or very important part of their business as a potential space for sales, collections/fulfilment or returns.

As local councils and business consortiums look at ways of revitalising the high street, retail parks, emerging from the global pandemic in a relatively strong position,[1] look to build on their success, and shopping centres are doing their best to build custom, the car park could unlock a variety of key opportunities for retailers.

The caveat is of course, the availability of car park space. Many European shopping areas are pedestrianised or lack convenient parking. Parking charges are a regular bugbear for UK shoppers[2] so, for many brands, optimising the car park may not be an option. However, for those that have access to a car park, there are a variety of ways to make the space an extension of the store and offer customers an enhanced shopping experience.

Parking Lot Activation or Fulfilment on the Forecourt
A key way to eliminate potential pain points and create more convenience for customers is to make the car park a space for fulfilment of digital orders. A solution such as Scala's Parking Lot Activation offers customers a quick, streamlined way to have orders satisfied. For brands, the solution not only deepens customer loyalty but also offers them a way to gather essential data, deliver personalised marketing messages to customers and minimise waste.

When the customer places their order, they can choose a store branch and time for collection. When the customer enters the car park at their selected time, they can be recognised via their license plate or the proximity of their personal device. Through a digital display in the car park or their personal device, they can be welcomed to the car park and directed to an allocated car park space where they will receive their purchase. Once parked they can confirm their order and ID with a code on a terminal digital display or perhaps a personal tablet carried by a welcoming member of the store team. Once the customer ID is confirmed, the order can be delivered to the car, perhaps loaded directly into the boot of the car. While the customer is waiting for their items to arrive, the terminal display can display personalised or seasonal offers or suggest complementary products to those already purchased.

[1] https://www.ft.com/content/92234e27-a5ae-44e5-a07c-69caaa2d0034
[2] https://conversation.which.co.uk/money/your-view-are-parking-charges-killing-our-high-streets/

A satisfaction survey could also be given at this point or sent following the transaction. Additional purchases can be made via the customer's personal device, the terminal screen or a store tablet. As the shopper leaves the car park, they could be sent off with a thank you message on screen.

This solution works especially well for large items such as furniture or for orders containing many items such as groceries but could provide a convenient option for purchases of many types. Brands could even collaborate and provide a one-stop fulfilment solution for businesses located in one retail park or in a town centre. Fulfilment lockers could also be placed on car parks as could a drive thru kiosk specifically for fulfilment.

Returns

Returning unwanted purchases is another aspect of retail which could benefit from a parking lot solution.

From the brand website or app, customers can select parking lot return as the return method and, similar to the fulfilment scenario, be directed to a parking space and have their return facilitated by a member staff. The staff member could record valuable data on the reason for the product return or potentially convert the return to a replacement or exchange. An alternative could be that a returned item would be scanned and returned to a locker or deposit box located in the car park or potentially via a store drive thru kiosk located in the car park.

Beyond Click and Collect

Beyond providing a solution for fulfilment and returns, the car park can also be used to create a deeper brand experience. Experiential retail when transferred to the car park, could be a pop up retail experience, such as a farmer's market or designer sale or potentially a branded experience such as a live event based around a toy or character brand.

Retailers with the available space could also consider, where building regulations allow, adding additional amenities to the car park such as a quick serve restaurant drive thru offering. By making the car park a destination in its own right, brands can drive more footfall (or wheelfall) to their premises. These need not be permanent changes - instead of a fixed restaurant, perhaps food trucks could be used. With careful consideration of the available space and the potential opportunities available, a retailer can use their car park as a creative and cost-effective way to extend their brand and deepen the customer experience.

Conclusion

Where available, the car park holds huge potential for brands. A currently underused location, employing an integrated solution such as parking lot activation can differentiate brands from their competitors, creating a convenient click and collect option for customers and offering opportunities to deepen customer intelligence, experience and loyalty.

Fundamental to the success of any new digital investment or implementation is finding the right technology partner. Retailers should look to find a technology partner who understands the potential of their business and are able to power digital implementation in the future with a sound strategy and deep knowledge of the process to mitigate risk and optimise for future inclusions or growth. Scala is a proven, trusted technology partner with an integrated hardware, software, services and support solution powering digital solutions across retail brands of all types. Talk to a Scala solutions expert today to discuss business goals and how an integrated solution could benefit your brand.