

Mannequin that tells you what it's wearing: Dummies that talk to shoppers via their smartphones set to be switched on today

- **Trial involves House of Fraser, Hawes & Curtis and Bentalls**
- **Models fitted with beacons that sent alerts to shoppers' smart phones**
- **App gives information about what mannequin is wearing and what it costs**
- **App will also connect to the retailer's website so it can be bought online**

By **SEAN POULTER, CONSUMER AFFAIRS EDITOR**

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Smart mannequins that 'talk' to shoppers through their smartphones will go live today in what is a world first.

A trial involves branches of House of Fraser, Hawes & Curtis and the Bentalls department store.

The models are fitted with beacons that send alerts to the smart phones of shoppers who are passing within 50 metres, providing access to information about what they are wearing.

FROM THE DUMMY TO YOUR SMARTPHONE

- 1** Store uploads information on the products worn by the mannequin to a beacon installed in it via the internet.
- 2** Shopper has to download Iconeme app to authorise the Bluetooth connection.
- 3** When smartphone is within 150 feet of the beacon, an alert is triggered. User can access details about what the mannequin is wearing.
- 4** The app will show where the clothes can be found in the store. It can also link to the store's website to allow a purchase any time of the day or night.

Smart mannequins that 'talk' to shoppers through their smartphones will go live today in branches of House of Fraser, Hawes & Curtis and the Bentalls department store

People who download the associated app, designed by a British company called Iconeme, can learn about the clothes and shoes, in terms of where to find them in the store and how much each item costs.

The app can also connect to the retailer's website, which means items spotted in the window can be bought online regardless of the time of day or whether the store is open.

Customers can share details of what they are looking at with friends and family via their smartphones and the web to get advice on whether they ought to go ahead and buy them.

The technology is being used with French Connection and Jaeger clothes in

the window of the Bentalls store in Kingston upon Thames, as well as the House of Fraser 'buy and collect' store in Aberdeen and Hawes & Curtis in Jermyn Street, London.



Testing: The technology is being used at the Hawes & Curtis store in Jermyn Street, London (pictured), with French Connection and Jaeger clothes in the window of the Bentalls store in Kingston upon Thames, as well as the House of Fraser 'buy and collect' store in Aberdeen. The communication between the mannequin and shopper is effectively in the form of images and information on the screen or the smartphone, however in

the future it could be a spoken conversation.

Just as smartphones like the iPhone has the Siri voice control system for users, this same system could be used to 'chat' to the mannequin to ask questions about what she is wearing.

The idea of having a virtual conversation with mannequins has echoes of Dr Who, where the theme of shop dummies that come to life has featured several times over the decades.

It was first used in 1970 when the doctor, who was played by Jon Pertwee, came up against the Autons or Nestenes. The episode caused great controversy at the time with complaints it was too frightening for children.

More recently the character Rose, played by Billie Piper, was famously pursued by mannequins when the series was revived in 2005 and featured Christopher Eccleston as the doctor.



Coming to life: Rose, played by Billie Piper, was famously pursued by mannequins when the series was revived in 2005 and featured Christopher Eccleston as the doctor

The beacon is installed directly into each mannequin or, alternatively, a hi-tech billboard, and transmits information that has been programmed by the retailer via a secure web-portal.

The retailer can choose what information is made available, but equally important is the fact they can access information about the shopper. This can include the age, gender and location of the customer, what outfit was viewed and whether a purchase was made online.

Shoppers can set their own privacy settings on the app to decide how much information they want to share – if any – with the fashion brand or store.

The Iconeme founders are Jonathan Berlin and Adrian Coe, who together have over 50 years' experience in the retail industry, working with famous name fashion chains.

The two also run Universal Display, which is a leading manufacturer of mannequins and works with a number of top high street retailers, including BHS, Monsoon, Harvey Nichols and Arcadia Group, which owns Topshop. Mr Berlin said: 'This technology will change the way people shop on the high street, as it brings together both on and offline retail.

'Research shows that customers already use their smartphones while shopping in store, but until now, the retail industry hasn't realised the full potential of this.

'The beacon creates a completely new dimension to the shopping experience, by combining the consumer desire to be connected on the go, with the bricks and mortar store.'

Edward Smith, the brand manager of Hawes & Curtis, said: 'We chose Iconeme because we want to develop a greater engagement with our customers.

'Our visual merchandising team help bring our product to life in the windows and now we can have a better understanding of how this impacts the man and woman in the street.

'The VMBeacon also works 24 hours a day, so we can have instant feedback and instant sales as a result of our displays, even if the store is closed. It's a complete game-changer for the retail industry and we're delighted to be in it from the start.'

British families are the most enthusiastic in the world in terms of using the internet and technology for shopping.

Figures published by the British Retail Consortium (BRC) today (tue) show internet sales were up by 14.9per cent in July compared to the same month last year. More than one fifth of all spending on clothing – 21.2per cent – is now via online stores.

BRC director general, Helen Dickinson, said: 'July has seen good online growth and, for non-food products, one in every six pounds is now spent online.'

David McCorquodale, retail expert at KPMG, said the information held by web stores on their customers and their past purchases has been particularly effective in targeting them with tailored offers.

'Despite the glorious sunshine, retailers managed to capture shoppers' attention online through the use of targeted and innovative digital campaigns, linking products to holiday plans, festivals and sporting events,' he said.