

NEWS & ANALYSIS

Shop Windows Go Digital as Dummies Get Smarter to Boost Sales

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LONDON, United Kingdom — Dummies just got smarter. Three years after fashion retailers started outfitting mannequins with cameras to monitor shoppers, a London-based startup has devised models that can talk to customers – via their smartphones. Iconeme Ltd., founded in November by partners Jonathan Berlin and Adrian Coe, will today unveil the technologically enhanced dummies, which can transmit information about the clothes on display direct to mobile devices.

The smart dummy is designed “to give consumers much more of an experience when they’re shopping,” Berlin said in a telephone interview. For retailers, coupling “bricks and mortar and e-commerce” in this way can help convert store visits into revenue, he said.

Berlin is also managing director of Universal Display, a London-based maker of mannequins and retail display products for clients including department-store retailer Harvey Nichols Group Ltd. and Arcadia Group Plc, owner of Topshop. He declined to say which of Universal’s clients he has pitched the smart mannequins to, saying only: “They’re very interested.”

Iconeme’s VMBeacon, hardware which works within a 100 meters of phones that have a downloadable application turned on, enables retailers to beam details such as price, where to find the product in the store and links to make a purchase online. It also allows shoppers to get photos and more in-depth descriptions of items, and save looks to share with friends.

Well Received

The technology, which Berlin said has been well received by retailers in the U.S. and U.K., shows how the line between off- and online shopping is blurring. Eighty-four percent of smartphone shoppers use their mobile devices to help them browse while in a store, Iconeme said, citing Google Inc. estimates. Global apparel and footwear sales will increase 6 percent to \$1.9 trillion this year, according to researcher Euromonitor International.

“Installing this technology in mannequins ensures it occupies a prime location and an ideal focus point for shoppers, whether they are in the store itself or just passing by the window,” Berlin said. Dummies equipped with the hardware cost about 30 percent to 35 percent more than those that Universal Display sells without it, he said.

Italian mannequin maker Almax SpA introduced models containing facial recognition technology in 2011 to glean data on shoppers while they browse.

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