

ESSAY

High-Tech Tools Help Stores—and Shoppers

Stores are using new technology to learn about customers and deliver bargains.

By Karla Givens

Times are tough for American stores. From famous chains like Sears to tiny boutiques, stores are in a life-and-death struggle for survival. Their primary threat? The Internet.

Over the past 10 years, sales for online stores have grown twice as fast as sales in traditional brick-and-mortar stores. And no wonder: Shopping online saves time and money. Give a person 60 seconds and a smartphone and *click!*—he or she can snag a new pair of sneakers without leaving the house.

How can an old-fashioned store compete?

One answer is cell-phone tracking.

This new technology allows stores to gather information about you as you browse. The store's tracking system senses your smartphone and **monitors** your movements—where you go, how fast you move, where you stop, what types of merchandise you admire. Some stores also have high-definition video cameras that capture your facial expressions as you shop.

What's the point?

The more store owners know about their customers' behavior, the better they can make the shopping experience. They can improve displays, showcase popular merchandise, and streamline checkout lines. They can even

offer customized bargains. Remember those Nike Free Runs you drooled over but couldn't afford? What if you could have gotten a text with a coupon for 20 percent off before you even left the store?

Some people object to customer tracking, saying that it's a form of spying. But why all the fuss? We're already being tracked every time we go online. Websites keep track of every move we make—how long we spend on a webpage, which items we click on, and what we purchase. They use this information to create advertisements that follow us through the Internet like hungry dogs. (Ever Googled "what causes zits" and suddenly started seeing ads for pimple cream on every website you visit? It's not magic. It's online tracking.)

It's almost impossible to avoid online tracking. But if you don't want to be tracked in a store, the solution is simple: Turn off your phone. Problem solved.

You might think twice before doing that, though. Cell-phone tracking won't just save you money—it could help save your favorite store from having to close its doors forever. ●



SCAVENGER HUNT

Directions: Hunt through each article to find the following elements.

1. Underline the **central idea**, or **central claim**.
2. Put a star next to two pieces of **supporting evidence**.
3. Circle the **counterargument**.
4. Put a double star next to the writer's **rebuttal**.

Now YOU decide. Who made the stronger argument?