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Puma Steps Up In-Store Experience With iPad Concept

Customization Platform Revolving Around Apple Device Is Poised to Be the Most Extensive of Its Kind

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Using Puma's new Creative Factory customization platform, customers can use the materials on display as inspiration and then use iPads on telescoping arms to design the shoes.

NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- When iPads went on sale this spring, retail and agency execs buzzed about the implications for retail. The tablets, they said, had huge potential as interactive catalogs, personal shopping assistants and point-of-sale systems. Now, those predictions are coming to fruition.

Puma is poised to have one of the most extensive in-store iPad solutions, among retailers, with the rollout of its new customization platform, Creative Factory. Billed as a seven-figure investment, the concept,

developed by Spies & Assassins, a unit of Kirshenbaum Bond Senecal & Partners, revolves around the iPad and replaces a prior customization program dubbed "Mongolian BBQ."

"Puma is passionate about tapping into the creative energy of our consumers and we want our products to stimulate and enhance that urge to create," said Adam Petrick, senior head-global brand management at Puma. "The new Creative Factory for iPad is a great in-store platform for facilitating co-creation between Puma and people who love our brand."

In the store, a wooden table is scattered with materials used to build two of Puma's classic shoe styles, the "First Round" and the "Basket." A pole with three telescoping arms emerges from the center of the table; an iPad is bolted to the end of each arm. Customers use the materials on display as inspiration and then use the iPads to actually design the shoes. When the design is complete, it is sent to a fourth "administrative" iPad at the cash register.

Once a store employee processes the transaction, the order is released to the factory and its status is updated and tracked through an administrative app. In the next 12 to 24 months, other categories, such as bags, T-shirts and jackets, are expected to be added to the program.

The concept hits stores this month, first in 15 cities in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. In 2011, it will begin rolling out in the U.S. and elsewhere around the world. For now, the app is focused simply on the design of the shoe. But in the coming months the ability to share designs via Facebook and other social-media sites will be activated. Customers will be able to see who designed different shoes, where that person lives and how many other people have bought the design. Designs can be tagged and searched.



Puma also plans to allow people to build out their own boutiques, which will have a gaming aspect. New materials and badges will be unlocked depending on the popularity of a person's designs or boutique. Customers will also be able to issue design challenges to one another and enlist their friends to vote. Ultimately, Creative Factory will be available in store, as an app and online.

"We're able to drop this in inexpensively and pull a lot of folks into a very social experience," said Matt Powell, executive director-creative technology at KBS&P and a partner at Spies & Assassins. "Puma is really excited about things that let them play with their audience: social shopping, collaborative design, game dynamics. This is a really cool reflection of that."

Mr. Powell declined to put a firm price tag on the project, though he said Creative Factory as a whole represents a seven-figure investment for Puma. The use of iPads in store, Mr. Powell said, is significantly less expensive than traditional kiosks. Puma acquired the iPads independently, without establishing a formal

relationship with Apple.

It's too early to say what Creative Factory will generate, in terms of sales, but Mr. Powell is optimistic. He predicts "significantly" higher sales and volume than was generated by the platform's predecessor, "Mongolian BBQ."

That system, though popular, was clunky and riddled with technical problems and was ultimately decommissioned this fall.

Creative Factory is breaking new ground, though customization programs like Mongolian BBQ, mi Adidas and NikeiD has been around for years. What makes Creative Factory different is the social-sharing and gaming aspects as well as the use of iPads in store. The iPad's touch screen, as well as the app's broadcast-grade computer-generated imagery and 3-D modeling, will set it apart from competitors. And just having iPads in store will distinguish Puma. While plenty of retailers are assessing tablets for various uses in stores, few have actually begun using them.

"Anecdotally, I can put the iPad in front of anybody, and they'll enjoy creating shoes," Mr. Powell said. "People are used to interacting with computers now in a much more interesting set of ways, and that's just going to continue to happen."

In the coming months, industry execs expect more major retailers will incorporate tablets into their in-store environments. Already, Walt Disney has introduced a "Destination Disney" iPad kiosk in its redesigned Montebello, Calif., store. Brighton, a luxury accessories brand, and AllSaints, a fashion brand, are also using iPads in stores as interactive catalogs.

"We are seeing a ton of interest across a lot of our clients," said Chris Davey, senior VP at SapientNitro, which counts Target, JCPenney, Barnes & Noble and Foot Locker among its retail clients. He expects tablets will begin to have a more significant presence in retail in the next three to six months. "A lot of folks are in the formative stages of how to build these things out," he said.

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