

RETAIL TECHNOLOGY REPORT

Furniture/Today highlights 5 ways retailers are integrating digital technologies into their e-commerce, design and back-room processes, pages 8-10.

New traffic counter tracks who, what, when, where

BY CLINT ENGEL,
Senior Retail Editor, @ClintEngel

STERLING, Va. — Retail technology firm iConnect is rolling out a new traffic counting system that uses a handful of inexpensive digital cameras not only to count store traffic, but also to report on where shoppers

(SIA) will be completely obsolete,” Sinha said.

A better solution

With Visilytics, he’s promising to bring retail customers to a new level with camera technology replacing the WiFi sensors and any need to connect via mobile.

facial recognition calculation and map the seconds the human form spend in particular area.

Retailer friendly

Sinha said his old system is used in 21 furniture stores, including 15 Ashley HomeStores. In the case of the HomeStores, the spaces are 30,000 to 35,000 square feet and will probably need two interior cameras to pick up the movements in every location. He said he doubts it would take many more cameras to cover larger furniture stores.

“If its Nebraska Furniture Mart, they’d probably have six cameras because that’s a huge one,” he said with a laugh.

The cost will be minimal for existing customers who switch to the cameras, which cost about \$100 each. Their previous monthly subscription fee would carry over. New customers would have the expense of the cameras and a monthly service subscription that’s based on the number of cameras (\$50 per camera per month), Sinha said.

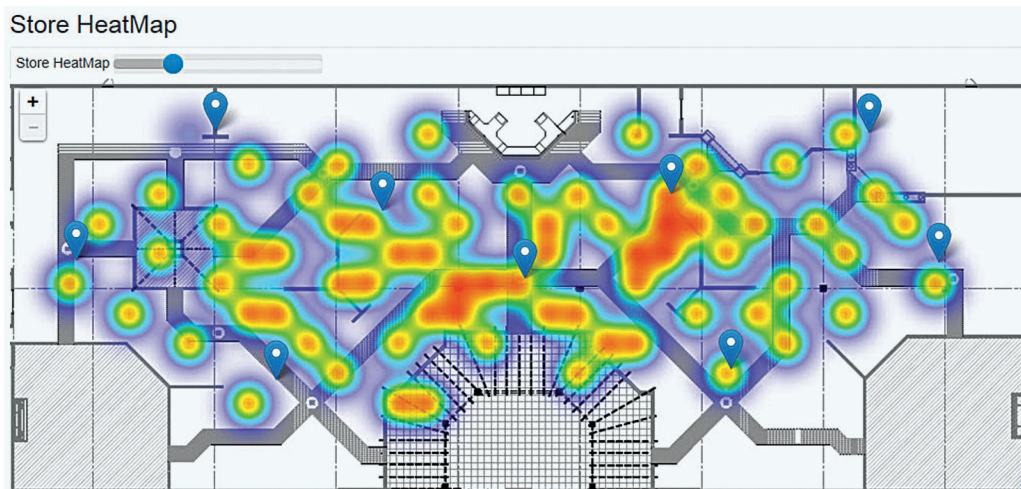
Ben Streiff, president of BPEC Enterprises, a Victoria, Texas-based HomeStore licensee, said he started with a “beam across the front door” traffic counter early on, gravitated to ShopperTrak and then on to iConnect’s SIA for its additional features, such as culling out the postal worker and store personnel from the count.

The SIA heat mapping technology helped his company become better at merchandising and buying, he said. It showed the “common pathways and how long (consumers) stayed in one area of the store, which helped us prove or disapprove why certain product may or may not be moving by its location in one part of the store vs. another,” Streiff added.

He’ll be among the first moving to Visilytics and its facial so recognition feature, which Streiff said is “about as foolproof as you can get regarding traffic-counting technology.”

“The heat mapping will be a little more reliable from what I understand,” he said. “We already like the accuracy of (SIA), but I think with the cameras, it will just that much more accurate.”

(For past coverage on other traffic-counter programs see the Sept. 28, 2015, issue of Furniture/Today.)



linger and whether or not they are repeat visitors.

The new Visilytics is slated to roll out around Thanksgiving time and is meant to replace a system that was launched just two years ago by Amitesh Sinha, owner and chief information officer of the Sterling, Va.-based iConnect.

That earlier system — called SIA for Shopper Intelligence Analytics — used WiFi routers, placed strategically in the store, as sensors to count and follow any consumer who walked in the door with a smartphone. SIA did a good job of calculating the number of shoppers, tracking their time spent in various areas of the store and reporting all this to the retailer for a low monthly subscription fee, Sinha said.

But earlier this year, mobile device manufacturers started messing around with MAC (media access control) addresses of these devices, and that threw everything off.

Apple started changing up the IDs, “broadcasting them in different shapes and forms every time they tried to connect to a network.” Then Samsung followed suit, Sinha said. SIA can still pick up a phone’s presence, but there no longer is a way to tell if the shopper is new or repeat visitor.

“In the next six to 12 months,



Sinha

for facial recognition to determine if the face in the new video matches the faces of any others who have walked through the doors over the past 90 days.

The system also will be able to screen out repeat

non-customer visitors, such as the postal worker or UPS driver (by their uniforms) and salespeople. It’s all automatic and “happening at lightning speed,” Sinha said. There’s nothing the sales manager or store owner has to do other than study the related analytics.

If the retailer also subscribes to iConnect’s greeter program, or up system, still images from the videos will feed into that system, tying customers to the salespeople who wait on them. So should Mrs. Dawson walk through the door, Visilytics knows if she’s a repeat visitor, and the salesperson who worked with her before gets a text message or notification on the greeter app signaling her arrival.

The SIA system used WiFi to create heat maps, color coded to show the hot zones in the store where consumers spend most of their time. Sinha said the new system will be able to do the same, but instead of using routers, two or more cameras strategically placed in the store will provide the data needed to make the

“The system will be able to screen out repeat non-customer visitors, such as the postal worker or UPS driver (by their uniforms) and salespeople. It’s all automatic and happening at lightning speed. There’s nothing the sales manager or store owner has to do other than study the related analytics.”

— AMITESH SINHA,
ICONNECT