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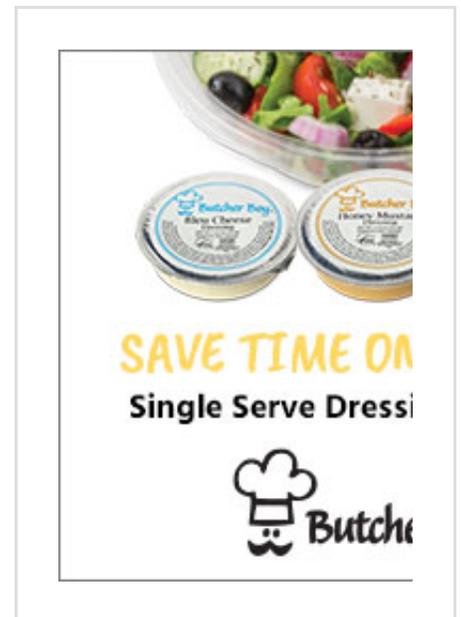
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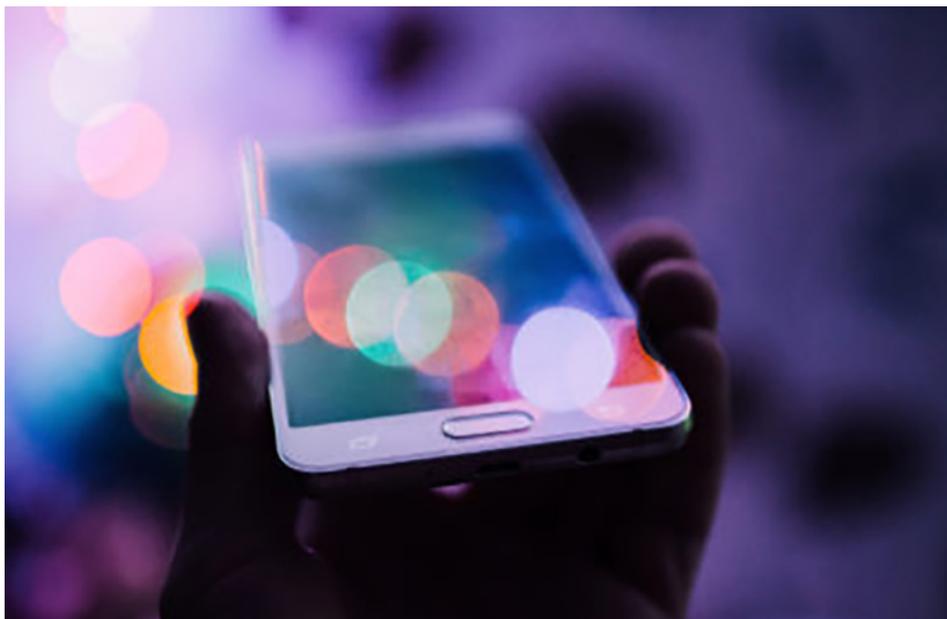


## Tech Trends Ahead for 2021

Savvy c-stores are following hard trends, i.e., future facts, and finding opportunities for innovation.

By Erin Del Conte | November 30, 2020





The COVID-19 pandemic has escalated the rate of digital disruption. Many c-stores are finding opportunities in this changing landscape, ensuring that they are necessity stores in terms of their offering, and rolling out new services such as order ahead, delivery, pickup, contactless payment and more.

I recently spoke with Daniel Burrus, global futurist, speaker and best-selling author to learn more about the disruption on the horizon for 2021 and how c-stores can position themselves for success.

“The pandemic made us change, and that meant either we go down for the count and do nothing, or we look at the tools — typically they’re digital — and how they can help us,” Burrus said.

The rise of e-commerce and remote working, for example, accelerated by 10 years in about five months.

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To plan a path forward, identify hard trends and soft trends. Hard trends are “future facts” that will continue to accelerate and gain power, Burrus said. Soft trends are based on assumptions about the future and may or may not happen — they can still be changed. Savvy retailers can look at the hard trends that are sure to occur and tie them to opportunities for their brand.

Hard trends to watch include e-commerce, apps, mobile and 5G, along with many of the changes retailers have already made in the midst of the pandemic, like order ahead and delivery, Burrus said.

“Home delivery, curbside pickup, contactless payments — that’s actually the future, and the future’s here now,” Burrus said. “So instead of thinking, ‘I don’t want to invest in it because when the pandemic’s over, we don’t need it,’ think differently. Think instead, ‘I’m going to continue to grow my business in more than one way. ... This is an opportunity to redefine and reinvent what this store does and how much money we can really make.’”

Other hard trends to watch in 2021 include automation, artificial intelligence and e-commerce-friendly point-of-sale systems. “We’re really in a period now where your e-commerce is blending with your physical, tangible store,” Burrus said. He pointed to touchscreen flat panels that could be placed in c-stores to display additional products that can be ordered and shipped to customers.

Voice commerce is also growing. Chatbots could be positioned in the c-store to answer questions for customers.



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Augmented reality glasses are on the way. “They look like glasses, but they’re tied, using Bluetooth, to your smartphone, and it allows you to overlay data in your field of vision without having to look at a piece of paper,” Burrus said. And Apple is rumored to be launching their version in 2021 or 2022.

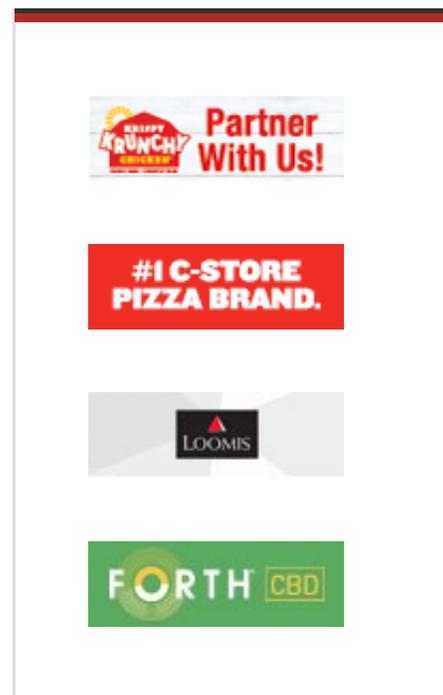
The Internet of Things is another hard trend to consider. We’re now using more sensors and making things smarter, and the data gained is providing behavior analytics, allowing stores to make display adjustments based on shopper data, Burrus explained.

While hard trends are key, soft trends — those that can still be influenced — are also important for operators to consider, so they can find ways to impact the change they wish to see.

“I think now is the time to make sure you’re refining your customer experience,” Burrus said.

For c-stores that look at hard trends and think, “We’re not big enough,” Burrus has advice for them, too. “Stop thinking of what you can’t do,” he said. “Instead, ask, ‘Is there a variation of this that might work on a scale I could handle?’ Open your mind,” Burrus advised. “You might find some huge opportunities.”

*Listen to the full podcast with Daniel Burrus at [CStoreDecisions.com/2020/11/20/Burrus/](https://cstoredecisions.com/2020/11/20/Burrus/).*



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