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## Interactive store window hits overhand smash for self-service

by [Bryan Harris](#) \* • 28 Aug 2006



In a city where shop windows are an art form, the one at the Polo Ralph Lauren store on New York's Madison Avenue is grabbing national buzz. It's the only one in the city, or the whole country, with images projected onto it that people can touch to buy clothes.

Ralph Lauren's son, David Lauren, senior vice president of advertising, marketing and corporate communications for the \$6 billion public company, said his idea for the store window came from the movie "Minority Report," in which Tom Cruise operates a computer by manipulating floating graphical images. The company deployed the interactive store window in August to coincide with its sponsorship of the US Open.

### The Approach Shot

The "window" is actually a translucent touch screen applied to the back of the normal store window. Mannequins inside the window sport dark blue and crisp white Polo tennis shirts. A projector, hidden by the blue back drop behind, shines a tennis video onto the 67-inch

screen constantly (customers can use it anytime, day or night).

When users touch the video, they enter the graphical user interface, with hand-sized buttons for: men, women and children's clothing; a life of a ball boy video; Nick Bollettieri tennis tips; a history of famous tennis feuds; and the chance to win a \$5,000 wardrobe for which users enter their e-mail addresses.

Customers can buy a limited selection of Polo tennis wear, pay for it via credit card, and have it delivered home.

The CPU is hidden with the projector. A card slide is located on the front of the window, which is the system's only external hardware. During operating hours, a neatly groomed fellow in Polo gear helps customers navigate the interface. His official job title is neither model nor greeter: He's an off-duty New York police officer who, among other responsibilities, makes sure nobody tears off the card slide.

Store loss prevention officer Christian Brown sported Polo tennis gear that matched the mannequins inside the window, while fielding reporters' questions in front of the store.

"People come by and stand in awe because this is the first time they've ever seen anything like this," Brown said.

### **The Spectators**

In the knots of people pacing Polo's side of Madison Avenue, faces constantly turned to the flashy store window and fingers often followed. It turned into a kind of sideshow. One Cuban family stopped to have their photos taken with Brown in his Polo tennis regalia, and he chatted with them in Spanish while another family tapped at the interactive window.



Dr. Michael Zenn, a North Carolina plastic surgeon, happened by with his family. He watched other customers use the window for several minutes before trying it out. He said the device offered shop-at-home Internet convenience, but customers could still see and handle the clothing.

"It's neat because you can see what's in the store without going in the store," Zenn said. "I didn't realize it was interactive, so they have to get that worked on."

61-year-old Michel Firquet, a New Yorker originally from France, encouraged his son, 10-year-old Charles Pierre, to enter his e-mail. When Charles couldn't figure out the device, his dad and the greeter walked him through it.

Marjaana and Tero Juotasniemi and their baby, Henni, who moved to New York from Finland, made a special trip down Madison Ave. to try the window.

"It's kind of cool," Marjaana said. "I've never seen anything like it. We saw it on TV and wanted to walk by and see it."

### **The Press Gallery**

Polo's store window didn't only divert the attention of passers-by, it grabbed national media coverage as well. News stations across the country and their Web sites ran with the story of the Minority Report-style store window. An AP write-up appeared in dozens of dailies. And Good Morning America ran a segment on the window during its first day of operation.

Michael Schulman, who occasionally freelances for *The New Yorker* magazine, visited the window for two weekends in a row, looking for the users' responses and getting

ideas for a freelance piece.

"It seems like more people browse than buy," Schulman said. "But people think it's cool."

## The Future

Paul Zaengle, vice president of interactive technology at Polo Ralph Lauren, supervised the store window's creation with the help of consultant Alex Richardson, managing director of Selling Machine Partners and president of the Self-Service and Kiosk Association.



Their collaboration and the store window it yielded represent the melding of old and new in the self-service industry.

Richardson, who patented the traditional secure Web-based kiosk, advised Zaengle on the creation of the next-generation store window that David Lauren envisioned from a science fiction movie.

In the immediate future, Polo Ralph Lauren has announced it will deploy kiosks at The US Open where spectators can

purchase products to be shipped home or to their luxury boxes in Arthur Ashe stadium. After that, the decision for Polo Ralph Lauren to use more self-service in the future is still teetering on the net.

The interactive store window comes down on September 10, and Zaengle said the company is still evaluating the project's outcome and will decide "in a month or so" whether or not to deploy more self-service technology in its own stores or department stores, though he did say customer reaction and use were better than expected. Meanwhile, his customers already imagine the windows becoming a fact of life.

"You can imagine a time when you will walk down a street and see a whole row of these," Zenn said.

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