Retail Innovation Shout Out: Nike Combines Old and New Methods to Drive Product Innovation

by Hajar Abu-Zayed

Nike continues to innovate their product development process, combining high-tech robots with old-fashioned customer feedback.

Nike has adopted the da Vinci Surgical System concept using a copper mannequin that they call Hal. But instead of a robot that is designed to facilitate complex surgeries controlled by a surgeon from a console, Hal is built to serve as the human element in tests that incorporate biomechanics, physiology, perception and athletic performance into design. One example is the use of its 139 ports that simulate sweating to check the effectiveness of moisture-wicking materials. Whew! Now that’s what I call breaking a sweat!

The Nike Sport Research Lab in Beaverton, Oregon is charged with driving product innovation to “create footwear and apparel solutions that lower an athlete’s body temperature and reduce his or her energy expenditure, thereby allowing him or her to train longer and harder.”

Leading edge tools like Hal are one of the key enablers for the Lab, but the other is old fashioned customer feedback. The Lab is a favorite stop for athletes when they are visiting Nike’s campus because they are able to be closely involved in the product development. They have the ability to provide direct feedback on product performance through testing and data.

Listening to customers and using advanced technology for product testing has proven to be a winning combination to help Nike scientists not only improve on existing products but also in create innovative products that the company is known for.

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