



VERIZON

Pick Up the Phone

As mobile communications devices take over our lives, they're exploding into retail spaces with customized store designs all their own. The message to customers: Go ahead and play with the equipment.

By Tom Zeit, Contributing Writer

It wasn't very long ago that we bought our phones at the electronics store, plugged them into the wall and sent a check to the phone company every month. That pretty much took care of most people's communications needs.

Things change fast. Now just about everyone has a cell phone and a calling plan, if not a BlackBerry or PDA, and that means we have to do a lot more shopping. And that lone phone company has exploded into hundreds of service networks. In response, many fast-growing wireless providers are shifting their retail focus from the chains' big-box stores and bare-bones mall kiosks to their own fully equipped retail stores.

JGA (Southfield, Mich.) took a similar approach to redesigning Verizon Wireless' stores, a concept

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that will eventually be implemented in more than 280 locations. There's a "demo bar" in front, computers prominently accessible for information and three zoned areas for family, business and youth. A touchscreen check-in kiosk for customer service is near the entrance, allowing people to browse as they wait, while the actual service desk is at the side of the store, where it won't interfere with customers' self-guided browsing.

The name of the game is simplicity, the elimination of clutter, both physical and visual. Think high contrasts, clean lines and smooth finishes, with a touch of the futuristic in the fixtures. "They're selling a technology product and they wanted the store to reflect that, to be absolutely up-to-date," says JGA creative director Mike Benincasa about Verizon

(although it's applicable to any of these clients).

"We minimized the fixtures," he adds. "The phones are displayed on a white background, so they really pop. And there's a lot of technology on that demo bar, but we downplayed the look of it to keep things simple. All those products are connected to touchscreen displays that prompt you on what you might do next as soon as you pick up the product."

Mobile, networked communications devices haven't been around long, and only very recently have they changed from a luxury plaything to a mass-market necessity. So they're still making their move into retailing. But they're finding a home for themselves in that environment, and as designers continue to perfect the interactive experience, the impact of these stores will grow at a lightning pace. ▀

Photos: In the interactive store environments employed by Verizon, designers are striving for a simple style of clean lines, smooth surfaces, spare furnishings and sharp contrasts. Verizon's Demo Zone featured-product station uses prominent, uncluttered displays, beckoning customers to pick up the merchandise and play.