

OLGA VIDISHEVA 2.0

The overachieving founder of Shoptiques.com—a hub for small, independent boutiques that don't otherwise have an online presence—eyes the next phase of her business. **BY JESSICA FLINT**

but now consumer behavior in-store can be tracked much more minutely,” notes retail consultant Robin Lewis, publisher of the retail industry bible *The Robin Report*. “We’re at the edges of a tsunami.”

Lewis dismisses concerns over privacy as, well, passé. “Millennials don’t care about privacy, and everybody else will soon die off,” he quips, adding that it won’t be long before that generation makes up 80 to 90 percent of retail sales. For 18- to 35-year-olds, individuality trumps anonymity, prompting retailers to seek new ways to personalize the shopping experience. Below are a few of the new technologies you can expect to see—or, more troublingly, not see—at a store near you. ♦

THEY’RE WATCHING YOU...

1 Forget delivery drones. If recent patent filings are any indication, Amazon’s next real-world foray is likely to be a brick-and-mortar store. Using a system of cameras, sensors, facial-recognition programs, and RFID (radio-frequency identification) readers to identify shoppers and items they’ve chosen, Amazon’s proposed mall store can fully automate and track the purchasing process. No cashier required.

2 Want to know how that purse detail or raincoat lining was made? At Burberry’s London flagship, waving a would-be purchase in front of the store’s interactive screens triggers videos and graphics via an embedded RFID chip that tells the backstory behind that particular item.

3 Remember Kim Cattrall in *Mannequin*? The Italian firm Almax brought the film’s concept to life a few years ago with its EyeSee

models. These robo-mannequins have cameras instead of eyes, which record the age, sex, and ethnicity of any shopper pausing in front of the display.

4 Russia’s answer to Sephora, the drugstore Ulybka Radugi recently launched a program that proposes discounts tailored to a shopper’s mood via facial-recognition software installed at each register. If a camera spots a regular who seems forlorn, for example, it can access and then sift through her purchasing history for a personal pick-me-up, perhaps offering a coupon for a guilt-free splurge on her favorite body lotion.

5 Meet one sales assistant who has an excuse for her robotic demeanor: Aiko Chihira, Toshiba’s android hostess, who blinks, smiles, and gives a six-minute guided tour of a department store in Tokyo where she was “employed” in customer service. — *M. E.*



Shoptiques founder Olga Vidisheva at her office, in New York City’s Lower East Side neighborhood.

I have six seconds to show you what you want to buy, or I’ve already lost you,” says Olga Vidisheva, founder of Shoptiques.com, a white-hot New York-based tech start-up whose nine curators go in search of fashion boutiques, home-goods stores, and gift shops around the United States (and foreign markets like Paris and London) that don’t have e-commerce and bring them online.

If her challenge seems lofty, it’s nothing compared to what she has already achieved. Vidisheva, who was born in Soviet-era Kyrgyzstan, moved to the United States as a teenager when her mother, a concert pianist, got a job in New Mexico. Vidisheva learned English by waitressing at a Japanese restaurant and later attended Wellesley College, modeling to pay her tuition.

At Goldman Sachs (the company hired her out of school, no wonder), she was one of two women among about 100 men in technology, media, and telecom investment banking. While at Harvard Business

School (she got in, naturally), she interned at Chanel, where her colleagues often complimented her on outfits that she had purchased at independent boutiques. This inspired what would become the founding principle of her new company: “It’s a luxury to be able to wear something unique that you can’t find anywhere else,” she says.

She launched Shoptiques three years ago and subsequently applied to Y Combinator, a prestigious tech incubator in Mountain View, California. (She was accepted, of course.) In 2014 Shoptiques was home to 250 boutiques; today it has 1,500. That’s 500 percent growth—all the more astounding considering the company is so focused on curation that it rejects 80 percent of the boutiques that apply. And Vidisheva—who is just shy of 30—shows no signs of slowing down. “The future for Shoptiques is figuring out how to use technology to show shoppers only the things they want to see,” she says. “Like a Netflix recommendation.” ♦

➔ See Olga Vidisheva’s picks for 10 under-the-radar American boutiques at Departures.com/boutiques.