Meeting the Needs of the Modern Grocery Shopper

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CEOCSFO: Mr. Bryson, according to your site, Unata is building the grocery shopping experience of the future. How so?

Mr. Bryson: Unata powers digital customer experiences for major North American grocery chains, including everything from being able to order your groceries online and pick them up at the store or have them delivered, to newer concepts such as personalized versions of the weekly ad for each shopper. Effectively, we are building the grocery shopping experience of the future through continued innovation of the shopping experience in order to put our grocers at the forefront of the retail experience.

CEOCSFO: Do most people pay much attention to grocery shopping or just see it as a chore?

Mr. Bryson: The wonderful thing about our industry is that everyone eats, so I would say yes, people pay attention to the grocery shop and appreciate when the experience is made easier and more convenient. We are seeing a rapidly increasing number of shoppers who will order their groceries online, plan their shopping trips online ahead of going into the store, and shoppers who rely on digital devices to make educated decisions around what they want to put into their bodies or where to go to get the best prices and deals. So yes, absolutely, people are paying attention to the grocery shop -- what they buy, where they buy it, and how they buy.

CEOCSFO: What are some of the features that are available for the end user?

Mr. Bryson: We provide a broad platform that addresses as many different digital use cases as possible; each of our retail partners then decide which features they want to enable. To give you some examples...
of what we have live in the market, Lowe's Foods, based in North Carolina, allows their shoppers to make an online order that is then picked by the grocer so that when the shopper gets to the store, the order is ready and waiting; the shopper no longer has to walk up and down the aisle to do their shopping trip, they can do that from the comfort of their home, from their office or on the go. This is a huge time saver for many people. Some of our other grocery retail partners offer delivery services allowing the order to be delivered directly to their door. We also work with retailers like Longo’s, who have transformed their weekly ad from a standard print paper version to a personalized digital version that highlights the most relevant deals and specials for each individual shopper based on what that shopper has purchased in the past.

CEOCFO: How do you translate a weekly ad flyer into mobile?

Mr. Bryson: Grocers typically take the paper medium and try to squeeze it into the digital experience, which works on a laptop or a desktop computer, but it really was not designed for either device and does not translate well to them: it is difficult to navigate and cannot be personalized. When they take it to mobile, those problems are exacerbated. We take a different approach with our retailers; we do everything on a data-driven level, connecting all of the different products on sale to what their shoppers buy, and then make predictions around what specials would be most relevant to each shopper. Then we serve it back to the shopper in a version that works for well on all devices, and enable the retailer to add imagery and marketing content to bring it to life.

CEOCFO: Do you find as there are more and more brands and sizes variations that customers are more likely to look for help?

Mr. Bryson: Grocery stores offer upwards to 50,000 products, but the average consumer only buys about 200 products a year. The shopper's consideration set is not very wide and I think that is because the breadth is intimidating. In addition, people’s diets and preferences are changing (with trends like gluten-free or organic) and access to information is much greater than it was five or ten years ago. Not only are grocers augmenting the shopping experience in the physical store to accommodate this, but they are also doing it through digital. There is only so much information you can place on a shelf tag. Retailers can use digital to take that list of 50,000+ products and figure out which ones really meet the shopper’s preferences, specific dietary concerns and criteria. They can then place those products front and centre as the shopper browses different departments and searches for items online. Digital allows people to meet their dietary goals in a way that was not possible before, and if the experience is done right, people won’t have to ask for help and the shop will be seamless.

CEOCFO: When a store or chain turns to you, do they typically know what they want or do they just know they want help? Would you walk us through the process?

Mr. Bryson: Many of our retailers are very progressive and have strong views around what they want to implement. Through the conversation, new ideas emerge and what I really enjoy about what we are doing is that each retailer is on a different journey. Many of them might start off building a new ecommerce experience but as they invest more into digital, they really start to go down their own path. The interesting thing
about technology is that it is evolving every day. It is amazing how much happens over the course of a year. Priorities are often changing, which is just a reflection of the market. So we need the flexibility with our partners to be able to change course as things change, and we build that flexibility into our platform. We have an open, two way dialogue with our partners and I think we both learn a great deal from each other as we move through the journey together.

CEOCFO: Does social media come into play for you?

Mr. Bryson: It does in the sense that we listen to what consumers are saying. Any time we launch a new experience, we are always paying attention to whether or not is working the way we hoped it would work. That goes back to the cycle of innovation. If we noticed that something we have launched is not quite delivering the experience or the satisfaction we had hoped for, we take that feedback into account and go back and revise the experience. Then we re-launch and listen!

CEOCFO: Do you find more personalization for customers, not only in shopping or an ad where they can get the products but perhaps special options for ongoing customers? Are you able to work with chain on how they treat their loyal customers differently than someone who is just coming to shop?

Mr. Bryson: Our platform is architected around enabling a 1-to-1 experience, unique to each shopper, rather than personalization through segmentation. That being said, the retailer can still create segments of customers -- like those who shop there often -- and send them different offers and content through the platform. On the flip side, the retailer can send special offers to those customers they haven’t seen in the store in a while, enticing them to return. It really comes down the retailer’s strategy, but at a technological level, yes, that is possible.

CEOCFO: Other than the changing technology, what have you learned as Unata has been available and what has changed in your approach over time?

Mr. Bryson: We’ve learned that the pace of change is both fast and slow. If you look at the news specifically related to the grocery industry, the tipping point has really occurred over the last twelve to eighteen months, with a huge amount of digital momentum and new, disruptive technology. At the same time, the grocery industry is so much more complicated than any other retail vertical, with more products on the shelf, inventory that changes on a daily basis, specials that change multiple times per week and differ between stores, and types of deals that don’t exist in other categories. These logistics and variables result in much more complicated implementations, making it more difficult to move fast. It also creates an interesting tension -- and balancing act that I am continuing to learn -- between wanting to stay up to speed while also taking the time needed to deliver a wonderful, high quality customer experience.

CEOCFO: What is involved on the part of the store? Do they input the weekly information for a sale? Does it go to you and you format it?

Mr. Bryson: We work with the retailer’s technology and IT team to set up an automatic transmission of data between their systems and our
systems so that it can run automatically. We also give them tools to be able to manipulate the look and feel of the platform, add their own imagery and content, and create unique offers and content.

**CEOCFO: Are there many companies that focus strictly on the grocery vertical?**

**Mr. Bryson:** There certainly are. We have many competitors.

**CEOCFO: Why Unata?**

**Mr. Bryson:** There are three main reasons: 1) Our focus on personalization really sets us apart. Many people talk about personalization but we are doing it in a way that delivers true 1-to-1 experiences that are valuable to the end user, setting us apart. 2) Our dedication to the user experience. We’ve designed a platform for our retailers that their shoppers love to use -- one that is beautiful, easy to find products, and overall more convenient than the rest. 3) We are insanely committed to ongoing innovation. We are always upgrading our platform, launching new capabilities and staying ahead of our competitors. We are always trying to outdo ourselves.

**CEOCFO: How do reach out for potential new customers or do people know you and find you at this point?**

**Mr. Bryson:** It is a combination of things. We are fortunate enough to have great partners with great success stories, which turn into compelling press releases. Our partners also help us with referrals. We do have a brilliant sales and marketing team, focused on showcasing Unata’s industry thought leadership through rich content, best practices and insights. We want retailers to know about Unata and see that we are pushing the industry forward, even if they might be working with our competitors. We want to see this industry succeed and to ensure that as many shoppers as possible get the best digital grocery experience.

**CEOCFO: What is next for Unata?**

**Mr. Bryson:** We have gone through a year of rapid growth and we are expecting to see a lot more in 2017. We want to make sure that we can keep outdoing ourselves and not only grow the number of retail clients but also increase the success of the ongoing deployments that we have with our existing retailers. We have signed a few new retailers that we get to announce in the New Year and we are very excited to share this with the world. The short answer to your question is that we see lots of exciting and innovative work ahead of us!