Business challenge

Mondadori Store realized that many of its customers spent a long time searching the shelves for the perfect purchase—and often left empty-handed if they couldn't find something they wanted quickly enough.

Transformation

Mondadori Store revolutionized the way customers shop for books by working with Mauden and IBM to build MyStore, an in-store virtual shopping assistant powered by IBM Watson™ and hosted in the IBM Cloud™.

Francesco Riganti
Marketing Director
Mondadori Retail

Business benefits:

Unlocks
insight into customer preferences, enabling bespoke book recommendations

Boosts
engagement and loyalty by personalizing the customer experience

Helps
to lift potential revenues at flagship stores by increasing customer visits and sales

Mondadori Store
Finding the perfect book every time with an in-store virtual assistant powered by the cloud

Mondadori Store is Italy's most extensive chain of bookstores. With 600 stores across the country and the e-commerce website mondadoristore.it, it serves 20 million customers every year.

"The possibilities offered by IBM Watson Personality Insights are not far short of science fiction: it enables us to develop algorithms that analyze customers' personalities and suggest the right book for their needs."

Francesco Riganti

Marketing Director

Mondadori Retail

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Revolutionizing book-shopping

Traditionally, when customers visit their local bookstore, they know that they might need to spend a considerable amount of time searching the shelves and browsing to find the right book. For many people, this leisurely kind of book-shopping can be a great pleasure—but when it needs to fit into a busy schedule, it can become a stressful chore.

That's bad news for booksellers. If customers can't find what they need, they might leave your store empty-handed—and if they are in too much of a rush, they might decide to shop online instead. After all, one advantage that online book retailers offer customers is the simplicity of navigating their product catalog. By providing search functions, reviews and recommendations, they have raised customers' expectations for how quick and easy book-shopping can be.

Italian publisher Mondadori Store has always taken pride in its well-stocked, welcoming bookstores—it currently has 600 and counting, across the whole country. However, the company knew that maintaining sales and store visits in the long term would depend on finding a way to disrupt its online competitors. It wanted to create a truly compelling in-store experience that online-only bookstores could not match.

Francesco Riganti, Marketing Director at Mondadori Retail, explains: "Today's publishing industry has been greatly disrupted by technology. At Mondadori Store, we have been able to keep up with the fast pace of change by building successful digital channels – but it is our physical stores that have truly defined our company throughout its history. We wanted to put the in-store experience back on top."

The company realized that it could harness technology to help customers navigate its physical stores with the same speed and convenience that they would expect from an online store. In particular, it saw the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to take the customer experience to the next level.

"We saw that AI could be instrumental in helping our customers find not only the books that they are specifically looking for, but also the books that they don't even know they want," says Riganti. "This would help us boost satisfaction and deliver an unrivaled in-store experience."

Turning the page with IBM and Mauden

While visiting a technology showcase in Milan, Francesco Riganti discovered IBM Platinum Business Partner Mauden and learned about the innovative solutions that Mauden was developing.

"It was truly an enlightening encounter," says Riganti. "We joke that it was love at first sight!"

The team at Mauden worked with Mondadori Store to create a first-of-a-kind solution for the Italian publishing industry: an AI-powered virtual shopping assistant that customers can access from touchscreen devices installed in-store. To emphasize the highly personalized experience that the virtual assistant provides to each customer, the platform was named "MyStore".

GETinTOUCH, Mauden's custom-developed interactive digital signage solution, is the platform that powers MyStore. GETinTOUCH is hosted in the IBM Cloud, and uses an IBM Cloudant® database to capture information from customers' social media profiles, collecting data on book preferences and purchases.

The solution uses IBM Cloudant rather than a traditional relational database because it offers greater scalability, efficiency and flexibility for ingesting ever-increasing quantities of customer data in multiple formats, such as JSON data from social media APIs.

Mondadori Store also leverages IBM Watson Assistant to enable communication and engagement in natural language between MyStore and its customers, via a touchscreen interface. The natural language capabilities enhance the solution's user-friendliness, making it appeal to a much wider range of customers, from young children to the elderly.

Meanwhile, IBM Watson Analytics® helps Mondadori Store dive deep into the activity of each MyStore device to analyze the quantity and quality of customer interactions, effectively providing real-time mapping of each store's performance.

The real jewel in the crown of the MyStore solution is IBM Watson Personality Insights. "The possibilities offered by IBM Watson Personality Insights are not far short of science fiction," explains Riganti. "Watson enables us to develop algorithms that analyze customers' personalities and suggest the right book for their needs."

When customers enter one of Mondadori Store's flagship stores in Milan or Rome, they immediately see the MyStore kiosk, with a screen displaying its three functions: MyBook, MyGift, and MyFinder.

MyBook helps customers find the right book by performing cognitive analysis based on their social media profile. If the customers allow the kiosk to connect to their Facebook profile, it looks at data on books, music and films, and guides them through a selection process to identify their personal tastes.

"With MyStore, we are confident that we will attract more customers to our stores, which will ultimately boost sales and strengthen our position as Italy's leading chain of bookstores."

Francesco Riganti, Marketing Director, Mondadori Retail

MyBook then integrates the results with other data, such as the users' date of birth, and their friends list, and generates a "Chosen for you" list of suggested titles. Users can also add books to a list of favorites in the "Discover products" section any time they access MyStore.

MyGift allows users to find the best books to give as gifts. The MyStore solution can profile a recipient by asking the user to selecting the titles and types of books that they prefer. The solution then creates a gift-list with a set of personalized recommendations.

Finally, with MyFinder, users can easily find information about all the books in the store's inventory: pictures, prices, summaries, and even the position of the product on the shelves. Again, MyFinder has been designed to be highly personalized, and will show appropriate information based on users' individual preferences.

Bringing book-lovers back to the store

Mauden's solution using IBM Cloud and IBM Watson technologies is helping Mondadori Store obtain unprecedented insight into its customers, which in turn drives excellent customer engagement in store.

By pinpointing each customer's specific preferences and reading habits, the MyStore platform improves customers' ability to find the books they want—and even introduces them to new books that they might never have discovered without MyStore's help. This encourages customers to seek out Mondadori Store instead of visiting other retailers or shopping for books online.

Francesco Riganti remarks: "Our surveys show that customers are enthusiastic about the MyStore kiosks at our flagship locations in central Rome and Milan, so we are planning to add more stores in the future."

He concludes: "The better we know our customers, the better we will be able to guide them towards books that they will really love. Instead of deciding to shop online, they'll come to our stores, because we're making book-shopping a much more joyful experience. If they need a specific book or a gift for a friend, we can make that process quick and easy— giving them more time to enjoy browsing our shelves for themselves.

"With MyStore, we are confident that we will attract more customers to our stores, which will ultimately boost sales and strengthen our position as Italy's leading chain of bookstores."

Solution components

- IBM® Cloud™
- IBM Cloudant®
- IBM Watson® Analytics®
- IBM Watson Assistant
- IBM Watson Personality Insights

Take the next step

To learn more about IBM Cloud solutions, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit www.ibm.com/cloud

Founded in 1987 and headquartered in Milan, Mauden is a Platinum IBM Business Partner. The company's 130 staff specialize in systems, managed services, and digital and cognitive solutions. To learn more about Mauden, please visit www.mauden.com

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