

Convenience mart on wheels viewed in Shanghai

15 June 2017, by Nancy Owano



We know about technology and business models having the power to shake things up for the taxi industry; we know the technology and business model kind of disruption that is shaking things up in the hotel trade; what's up for retail?

We're not talking about online sites versus brick and mortar stores; that is so yesterday.

What about a concept that involves online and offline convergence, where you obtain items in a store via phone?

One entrant is in Shanghai. A grocery store run around the clock seven days week—run, we said, by artificial intelligence, the cloud and a whole lot of forward thinking.

The Moby Mart. Think the convenience store around your way only this one is designed to be autonomous, staffless, cashless, mobile and with no checkout lines. It's in Shanghai, China. The store is going through tests in performing its role as a full service convenience store on wheels.

The Moby Mart is developed by Wheelys Inc in cooperation with Hefei University and Himalafy. According to "The Future of Retail," a presentation that is part of Moby Mart's press material, "Über, Airbnb, and similar companies have revolutionized ancient monopolies. But one bastion still stands: physical retail. It's a market comprising 21% of the world's economy."

The Moby Mart website said it's currently being beta tested in Shanghai and had set the launch date as June 13.

Forbes said it is stocked with snacks, over-the-counter medicine and assorted [sundries](#). Fruit, pastries, sneakers, magazines, anyone?

To enter its door you download an app on your phone and when you are in the store you scan what you need from your phone.

A hologram-like AI greets you, and, as you shop, you scan what you want to buy.

Moby's hologram assistant is aptly named Hol and Hol can help the customer find what's being looked for. "Hello, Miranda," a gentlemanly voice said in the promotional video. "Welcome Back."

Pharmacy services featuring first aid devices, as well as coffee shop services, are in the mix, said *progrss*.

The store will automatically charge your card when you leave, *progrss* said.

"Customers scan the barcode with their phones and the store charges the embedded card without requiring them to stand in line and wait for their turn."

The Moby Mart calls for a store that is open every day of the year, yes, for 24 hours.

Technology at play? The company describes the tech mix as "AI, patented inventions, and the famous [cloud](#)." The store has an "Integrated Air purifier," they said, as "the W247 Mobile does not only not pollute; it cleans up."

outlets like Amazon's new brick-and-mortar [stores](#)."

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On the roof of the Moby are solar panels, which recharge the battery of the electrical engine. *Forbes* said the vehicle was the size of a small bus. Also, the Moby Mart will have 4 drones deployed on the roof.

They are currently working with tech to make the Moby self-driving.

How does this concept measure up for those who would want to do business running this type of mobile, automated [grocery store](#) of the future? One thing in its favor is that it appears cheaper to build and operate than a conventional convenience store.

"The biggest costs to have a store are the place itself to rent in a central city—it's ultra-expensive—and then staff is really expensive, and we're removing both of these at the same time," said Tomas Mazetti of Wheelys, in *Fast Company*.

Cost?

"We are now setting up production in China. Our price estimation is that a store will cost less than \$100,000 — around a tenth of the price to [build](#) a traditional store," said the company as quoted in *Forbes*.

Also, business efficiencies appear to be well addressed in this Moby model. According to the *progrss* article, "Moby can detect when it needs to be restocked, and journeys to the warehouse to do so. Saving time and energy, and using cloud technology, Moby stores are able to locate one other and exchange surplus [products](#) with others that they need."

What's also next?

"By 2018, said *Fast Company*, Wheelys expects to be ready to produce and sell the stores, and help franchisees compete with other coming retail

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