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Idea of the week: Product reviews could be texted to you in shop

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WALKING into a branch of Dixons or Comet in the run-up to Christmas can be daunting.

Long before irate fathers have to make their post-Christmas trips to buy batteries, the choice of which music system, television set or other appliance to buy for family and friends can leave unprepared shoppers at the mercy of ruthless salespeople.

It would be nice to think that we all do our shopping fully appraised of the choices on offer, but the truth is that most of us have maybe one model in mind — and if that is out of stock, we flounder.

This is where a quick text message could prove a life-saver. There are not many shops that have copies of What Hi-Fi or Which? lying around, so a text-message service that allowed customers to send off an appliance's make and model number and receive a quick review within a couple of minutes would surely be popular.

The technology exists in services such as 82ask, which gives out general information on request and was recently reviewed in these pages. It allows users to fire questions from their phones (to number 82275) and get a fast response.

"We get loads of requests at this time of year for the best or cheapest Playstation or DVD player, so I think there would be demand for this," said Sarah McVittie, founder and chief executive of Re5ult, the company that runs the 82ask service.

"We have a combination of clever technology and human researchers. The systems learn to categorise requests and will automatically send answers to repeat questions.

"However, people do tend to be very specific with their questions and it is important to have a human being there to deal with follow-up requests."

Re5ult employs almost 50 researchers, but a service that gave technical specifications and consumer reviews would have the potential to be much more automated than a general-information provider. So the challenge for a new service would be to secure the co-operation of consumer magazines that could provide authoritative reviews.

Google is already rolling out a text-message service that allows users to compare the prices of products sold over the internet with prices in the shops. At the moment this is available only in America via its Froogle service.

So why not go a step further and provide an entire review?



Prices from
£30
PPPN



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