

# Viva Móvil Could Be a Step in the Right Direction

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When Jennifer Lopez last week showed up at CTIA to [announce the new wireless Latino-targeted retailer Viva Móvil](#) [1], the first question from the audience was about how this could translate to the retail experience for all Verizon customers. The question seemed to suggest, “It’s great what you’re doing for the Latino population, but what can be done do make the wireless retail experience more tolerable for all humans?”

Checking out new phones can get people pumped about going to the wireless store but the overall experience usually leaves them a little deflated. With so many consumers still on the two-year contract plan, it’s still a fairly rare occasion that one has to visit their carrier’s bricks-and-mortar shop. Of course if there’s a problem with your device or your service, which happens frequently, chances are good you’ll be swinging by and it won’t be fun.

So Viva Móvil presents an interesting proposition. The partnership between Lopez, Moorehead Communications, Brightstar and Verizon, aims to make the process less painful, even family-friendly. Something Brightstar CEO Marcelo Claire highlighted at CTIA was the dedicated kids’ play areas that will be in the center of the Viva Movil stores. That could be beneficial for parents who have to bring their kids along and would just as soon not have them busting up the expensive display handsets.

A tiny playground to keep the little ones busy is an improvement, considering the criteria—sales staff, price/promotion, store facility and store display—by which JD Power determines the best wireless retail experience. And the all bi-lingual staff that Viva Móvil employs is a tremendous service for the U.S.’s huge Spanish-speaking population. But it’s still not enough.

When I go to get my oil changed, I’m offered free coffee and cookies. When I drive through my credit union, the teller gives my daughter a sticker. I’m not suggesting a wireless retailer needs to risk having people spill coffee and slap Dora the Explorer decals on the showroom’s Galaxy S4 in order to keep customers happy. But carrier stores and wireless retailers could go further in making the customer feel valued especially considering how big of a time and financial commitment many of them are making. Most of those stores don’t even have a public restroom.

Customers will always want to feel a device in their hand before they buy it, making stores valuable and Viva Movil’s push to make those stores more accessible for a big chunk of the population a wise move. But where Viva Móvil really seems to have

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hit on something is with its Facebook integration. Calling it first-of-its-kind social commerce, Viva Móvil set up a digital storefront right on its Facebook page, allowing for easier comparison shopping within one's social network.

Lopez pitched it as a helpful tool for Latinos who enjoy shopping as a social experience, but more than just the Latino population like shopping with friends. And this type of "social commerce" is indicative of the trend toward consumers educating themselves—via learning from friends or reading research, reviews and news—and buying their wireless devices and service away from the retail shops. The practice has devalued the store experience, at least in terms of a staff, and the public's reliance on it to navigate a confusing world of devices, networks, contracts and subsidies.

If carriers want end-users to keep signing on for the long haul instead of taking their business to low-commitment pre-paid options, a good first step would be showing customers that they respect the multi-year magnitude of picking a carrier. And that could be as simple as addressing some common needs for customers going through the in-store process, like Viva Móvil is doing. Because if customers are willing to put up with carriers for two years, the least the carriers can do is make the 90 minutes or so spent in the store a little less excruciating.

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