

Verizon wants store to be an interactive Destination

'Lifestyle zones' will be some of the attractions as communications giant puts its technologies on display at its new BLVD Place location

By Sarah Scully
and David Kaplan

Verizon is encouraging Houstonians to play before they buy with a new interactive store set to open next month at BLVD Place.

The so-called Destination store allows customers to try out wireless gadgets, apps and tech gear. Verizon and non-Verizon wireless and mobile technologies will be displayed in interactive "lifestyle zones," devoted to sports and fitness, music, gaming, home monitoring and energy management and more. Customers can also create covers for their smartphones and personalize them with photos.

"We want people to think about technology in terms of how they experience it," said Krista Bourne, Verizon's Houston/Gulf Coast Region president.

"We want customers to have a place to go where they can actually experience it before they buy it. This store is intended to bring a real life experience into play."

The first Verizon Destination store opened at Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn., a year ago. The Hous-



Verizon's experience-oriented Destination store will open at BLVD Place near the Galleria at the end of November. Houston was chosen because "it's a market that embraces technology, it inspires innovation."

ton location will be one of the next two Destination stores to open in the U.S., and the first in either the South or Southwest.

Bourne said Houston was chosen because "it's a market that embraces technology, it inspires innovation."

She also said the early technology adopters also make up a talented pool of potential employees.

The two-story store in the Galleria-area BLVD Place is 12,224 square feet, with consumer products on the first floor and business products on the second. The business area will show products such as smart pumps for oil and gas companies, medical technology and fleet tracking systems for trucks.

Such experience-oriented stores

have followed Apple in creating impressive spaces with technology experts at the helm of customer interactions. AT&T opened its first new-era store in Chicago in 2012 and now has 44 stores across the country, including four in Texas. None so far is in Houston.

"This latest evolution of AT&T's company-owned retail store design breaks the mold of traditional telecom retailing by creating stores that are highly personal, emotionally engaging and integrated with digital. It emphasizes how technology helps enable our lives, instead of on the technology itself," an AT&T representative said.

Kelli Hollinger, director of the Center for Retailing Studies at Texas A&M's Mays Business School, agreed

that interactive stores like the new ones from AT&T and Verizon give consumers “a reason to go to the store.”

“They can purchase the products online,” said Hollinger, who has not seen a Verizon Destination store yet. “But if the store gives them a memorable experience too, it can be something that can be shared and social with others, because they’re interacting with employees, they’re interacting with other customers, and they’re probably interacting with more products than the one they initially planned to buy.”

Bourne said many customers will do their research online and visit the store to see how the product really works.

“In these stores they spend more time touching and feeling and really playing with the various connections that we offer,” she said. Plus, “it’s always a wow factor when people go into the store and people are not expecting to see what they see.”



Verizon’s second experience-oriented Destination store will open at BLVD Place near the Galleria at the end of November.