



Retail gadget | Photo source Pixabay

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## DEVICE HELPS LOCAL STORES COMPETE WITH ONLINE GIANTS

 RETAIL

**A new gadget aims to help small brick-and-mortar retailers compete with the large online retailers by letting potential customers see their stock online.**

A big challenge for bricks-and-mortar stores is how to connect online with potential customers in the local area. One difficulty is that customers who search online for a product are likely to see a result from Amazon pop up at the top of their search, even if there is a retailer with that item in stock 50 feet away. Two entrepreneurs based in Ireland think they may have an answer with a device that can point customers to local shops. Founded by Charles Bibby and Mark Cummins (who co-founded Plink – a visual search engine company acquired by Google in 2010), **Pointy** combines hardware and software to help local retailers effortlessly establish an online presence.

The hardware is a rectangular ‘pointy box’ which plugs into the store’s barcode scanner. When a product is scanned, it is automatically uploaded onto the store’s online Pointy page. Store pages are then optimized for search engines so that customers searching Google for an item in a particular locale will find the local store’s listing popping up at the top of their search. The service uses a freemium model where shop owners pay a one-time price of GBP 299 for the Pointy box and listing page.

Although stores in Ireland and 48 U.S. states already use Pointy, there is still a long way to go to demonstrate that the product can drive significant customers to shops. The service seems to work best when people type in very specific search terms, or search for obscure or niche products. Pointy offers a dashboard to show how many people have visited the site, but they can’t yet connect that

to an increase in foot traffic. To try and address these concerns, the company is raising USD 6 million from investors, including Paul Allen's Vulcan Capital, Draper Associates and Frontline Ventures, in order to develop the product further. We have seen retail develop novel ways of connecting the online world to the physical, such as an app that helps consumers find [ethical brands](#) and [coupons](#) delivered via text messaging. With the goal of bringing every retailer in the world online, will Pointy's model be able to level the playing field between small retailers and the online behemoths?

4th October 2017

Email: [info@pointy.com](mailto:info@pointy.com)

Website: [www.pointy.com](http://www.pointy.com)

Contact: [www.pointy.com/us/retailer/contact-us](http://www.pointy.com/us/retailer/contact-us)