

# The four key challenges in the retail sector

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How unified communications enhances the customer experience and optimises retail performance.

## INTRODUCTION

“Technological developments, including e-commerce and mobile apps, are being adopted at an astounding rate driven by the increasing use of smart devices. High speed connectivity, including Wi-Fi and 4G, means that customers have the option to shop when and where they want.”

**The retail sector has undergone significant transformation in the last decade with new technologies, intensifying competition and increasingly sophisticated consumers all playing their part in revolutionising the retail landscape.**

While the industry spans an array of categories, most retailers are affected in some way by the same trends. Volume discounters and low-cost retail chains currently dominate the market, while bricks-and-mortar establishments compete with each other and against pure-play online retailers. As the Internet grows, customer choice has expanded, creating a highly competitive and global market. With the digital world fast becoming the norm, navigating the vast “online catalogue” is the prime challenge for customers, while retailers must ensure their products and services can be found and purchased quickly and easily.

Technological developments, including e-commerce and mobile apps, are being adopted at an astounding rate driven by the increasing use of smart devices. High speed connectivity, including Wi-Fi and 4G, means that customers have the option to shop when and where they want.

But servicing their “anytime, anywhere” buying requirements is just part of the challenge. Every brand touchpoint must be consistent and appropriate to the channel employed to deliver it, while every stage of the customer journey - from order confirmation through to customer service enquiry or product return - must be simple, easy and responsive. Quite simply, the “new customer” adopts the perspective of, “know my tastes, predict my needs, offer great deals, make it easy to buy and deliver excellent customer service”.

Retailers are witnessing the growth of a new breed of customer, the “autonomous customer”, so called because they spurn automatic brand loyalty, looking instead to peers and online communities to support and inform their purchasing decisions. Autonomous customers use self-service to stay in control, are less loyal and harder to engage. With power and choice at their fingertips, they can afford to be more selective about who they buy from. The emergence of the “go online, then choose” mindset cannot be underestimated, underlining the importance of delivering a consistently high quality service to customers, who may directly influence other potential buyers.

## INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

The number of service channels has created unprecedented choice, with most customers now taking omnichannel retail for granted. This creates significant challenges for retailers to provide a truly integrated brand experience. While many retailers already offer multiple channels, each channel may deliver an interpretation of the brand experience. The net result is brand inconsistency across channels, largely resulting from the underlying operational systems relied upon, which disrupt the ability to deliver a truly customer-centric experience. Ensuring consistency across stores remains an ongoing challenge, as retailers struggle to deploy customer-friendly aspects of the online experience to the shop floor.

Customer engagement remains a high priority, as the sector begins to embrace and deploy mobile strategies alongside a physical store presence, to unify the brand experience and take customer engagement to a new level.

However, many retailers still rely heavily on legacy systems and outdated technology. Remaining competitive will require a step-change in the integration of back office systems, such as ERP, CRM, procurement, warehousing and logistics, if retailers are to gain a universal view of customers and their interactions.

For transformation to be successful, retail brands must have a clear focus on understanding their customers intimately, providing a highly personalised experience that delights the customer and encourages loyalty, while striving for operational efficiencies and cost reduction.

Finding effective ways of using advanced communication technologies is key to retail success, providing the foundation for responsive and seamless communications with customers, supply chain partners and within the business. This white paper provides an overview of the key challenges currently faced by the retail sector and the benefits that can be derived from a successful Unified Communications (UC) implementation.

## THE FOUR KEY CHALLENGES FACING THE RETAIL SECTOR

“Success for retailers lies in “me-tailing”, the process of understanding the customer and their tastes, in order to offer personalised interactions, product advice and offers which influence purchasing decisions and loyalty.”

The retail sector is fighting to keep pace with shifting customer behaviour and deciphering the implications of disruptive new technologies. Moving from a single point of interaction to a truly omnichannel experience, customers are demanding an enhanced shopping experience across all channels<sup>1</sup>. In recent years, retailers have witnessed a classic showdown of “clicks versus bricks”. However, technological developments are now able to bring the online and offline experience together, enabling retailers to adapt the traditional ways of conducting business.

Business transformation in any environment requires a deep knowledge, clear understanding and foresight of the specific issues, so that effective strategies can be deployed to alleviate their impact. This paper examines how effective UC can support retailers in meeting these demands and deliver personalised experiences to customers. We have used research from a number of independent sources, as well as feedback from our clients, to identify the four key challenges faced by UK retailers.

### 1. SYSTEM CONSOLIDATION FOR CONNECTED RETAIL

Due to the rapid adoption of new technologies, today’s customer is empowered to be “always connected” and traditional modes of buying have been revolutionised in recent years. Customers are demanding more from their brand interactions and the retail landscape is changing rapidly. Success for retailers lies firstly in understanding the individual customer and their tastes, in order to offer personalised interactions, product advice and offers which incentivise and influence purchasing decisions and loyalty. Known as “me-tailing,”<sup>2</sup> this process extends beyond post-sales customer service offers designed to increase repeat business. Smart retailers are using technology to profile, predict and respond to customer requirements, based on sophisticated analysis of customers - long before a single item has been purchased. The ability to capture, aggregate and interpret customer data is only achievable with the underlying infrastructure and systems capable of presenting a consolidated view of the customer’s interactions.

In such a highly competitive environment, retailers will flourish or fail based on how quickly and effectively they can respond to customers. But retail is a multifaceted environment requiring a complex business process model to handle all aspects of operations, from purchasing, warehousing and distribution to Point of Sale (POS), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), finance and logistics.

## THE FOUR KEY CHALLENGES FACING THE RETAIL SECTOR CONTINUED

“Retailers need to connect with customers at many levels and across multiple channels, migrating to a world where mobile and in-store shopping are no longer isolated, but a single amalgamated experience delivering digital parity.”

In many cases, retailers continue to use proprietary systems which operate within distinct departmental silos. With the vast amount of interactions between customers and retail brands – from an initial purchase, interaction with a brand’s social channels and telephone conversations with customer services – the volume of customer data is immense and likely to grow. However, an over-reliance on legacy systems that cannot integrate with other back office systems and social tools, leaves retailers with a significant and fundamental gap in their understanding of their customers. Moreover, these outdated, inefficient and expensive to maintain legacy solutions are not only a commercial liability, but underline the disconnect between what the customer desires and what the retailer is able to deliver<sup>3</sup>.

The net result is that many retailers face considerable legacy system issues with a proliferation of exclusive systems used by different teams and departments across the business. This brings significant challenges for staff, making it harder for them to collaborate and restricting their ability to efficiently deliver a first-class customer experience.

## 2. CREATING ENHANCED OMNICHANNEL INTERACTIONS

The rapid growth of digital over the last 10 years has created an environment where customers are more in control and brand savvy than before<sup>5</sup>. The widespread use of mobiles and smart devices is driving this growth and empowering the customer, resulting in changing behaviours and increased expectations. The instant gratification of digital channels means customers can shop anywhere, at any time and via a multitude of channels and devices. Simultaneously, customers expect new levels of personalised service, with a seamless experience that transcends the in-store experience and online presence<sup>6</sup>, creating an effortless shift between digital and physical. Customer experience, or CX, is the holy grail of retail and maintaining channel consistency and relevancy to each individual customer is no mean feat to achieve.

Meanwhile, marketers are working hard to build trust and loyalty, offering a personalised customer journey with offers and suggestions based on data analytics, as well as attempting to build brand engagement through social channels such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

As a consequence, retailers need to connect with customers at many levels and across multiple channels, migrating to a world where mobile and in-store shopping are no longer isolated, but a single amalgamated experience delivering digital parity. The omnichannel world offers retailers the opportunity to deliver a personal experience<sup>6</sup>, known as me-tailing, and signals a shift from transactional-based retailing to personalised customer relationships, where loyalty and repeat business are the ultimate goal.

While this has created unprecedented customer choice, it also creates significant challenges in terms of providing a truly integrated experience<sup>5</sup>. As a result, the implementation of an omnichannel experience is having a profound influence on the retail sector, challenging businesses to evolve their communication strategies in order to remain competitive.

## THE FOUR KEY CHALLENGES FACING THE RETAIL SECTOR CONTINUED

“Contact centres are increasingly taking centre stage in the battle to win the hearts and minds of customers who expect a seamless experience that is proactive, responsive, easy to interact with and personalised.”

### 3. ACHIEVING CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE IN THE CONTACT CENTRE

In such a competitive retail environment, “keeping customers happy” is a basic requirement, while the ability to deliver outstanding customer service can be vital in reducing churn. Increasingly important as a key differentiator, customer service excellence enables retailers to proactively influence brand perception, both pre- and post-sale, which can directly enhance customer acquisition, retention and loyalty.

Retail brands are demanding that their customer service operations work even harder<sup>8</sup>; this is becoming more evident as retailers make the transition to delivering an effective 24/7 omnichannel customer experience that works across boundaries and time zones, irrespective of the physical location of customer service staff.

This development is brought into sharp focus as customers form an immediate opinion based on their interaction with the retailer, no matter what channel of communication is used. The contact centre is an essential component in improving the customer experience.

Against this backdrop, the number of challenges faced by the contact centre are growing. Customers demand more from their brand interactions and the channels being utilised is evolving. Newer and more consumer-friendly channels including social media, webchat and video, are helping to enhance the customer experience, yet need to operate alongside traditional telephone-based customer service operations.

However, simply offering a greater number of service channels is not sufficient to achieve long-term and sustainable customer loyalty. Measuring the value gained from technology deployments and call handling strategies in real-time is critical to optimising service performance. Contact centre supervisors and management need the ability to monitor key performance indicators, combining data from customer interactions across multiple channels with company-specific information, such as service issues, product trends, and resource availability.

Effective contact centres need flexible management tools that support improved day-to-day operations, enabling supervisors to monitor agent performance and identify skills and knowledge gaps that may require additional training. Agent performance sets the benchmark for the customer experience, shaping perceptions of the business and influencing the customer’s likelihood to engage with or remain loyal to a brand, depending on how closely the retailer’s service matches their expectations.

As customer expectations increase, the management and resolution of issues into the contact centre has changed, leading to the emergence of “super agents”, able to handle the inherently more complex, omnichannel customer experience. Yet optimising the contact centre is not a simple task to undertake. No longer occupying the role of “resolution centre” when things go wrong, contact centres are increasingly taking centre stage in the battle to win the hearts and minds of customers who expect a seamless experience that is proactive, responsive, easy to interact with and personalised.

## THE FOUR KEY CHALLENGES FACING THE RETAIL SECTOR CONTINUED

“Retailers of the future will use intuitive technology and business intelligence data to interrogate a customer’s buying history and interactions to offer a personal experience – and this is going to be one of the persuasive shifts that helps bring customers back into high street shops.”

The many challenges faced by the contact centre and the way in which retailers address them will have a direct influence on the success of the business as a whole. With investment in call centres typically a once-in-a-decade occurrence, the stakes have never been higher.

### 4. IMPLEMENTING MOBILITY FOR ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT

Mobility is fundamentally changing retail by altering the way people shop and creating disruptive business models. Today’s shopper now uses smartphones and tablets to browse online, compare prices and place orders, with over 60 percent of pre-purchase web searches beginning on a mobile device. In addition, the majority of people research products on their smartphones and then buy in a physical store. One further factor is the emergence of mobility-based businesses, such as eBay, that level the playing field for retailers and are fuelling the current industry transformation taking place across the retail sector.

In this tumultuous environment where traditional strategies around product, pricing, promotion and placement are no longer sufficient, retailers must ask several important questions; Am I part of my customer’s new shopping journey, or have I lost the sale before I even knew it existed? Has my physical store simply become a showroom for online shoppers? How can I use mobility to benefit from changing consumer behaviours?

One of the main reasons for the rise of smart devices is the exceptional user experience they provide. Customers expect to be able to shop anytime, anywhere but also want the experience to be functional, seamless and personal. These positive experiences with mobility have led to high consumer expectations, sometimes making it difficult for retailers to achieve success with mobile applications and services. In fact, industry research indicates that only 25 percent of downloaded apps are used more than once. Even leading retailers are still making basic mistakes, with common mobile application errors including unreadable websites and asking customers to check availability at their local store.

However, many retailers are getting it right, using mobility to offer a whole new mobile experience. The benefits are wide-ranging and include providing transaction visibility, displaying customer preferences and choices, store opening hours, shopping reminders and in-store product availability. The common critical factor is that successful mobile apps are designed with the customer in mind.

While apps are crucial for retailers, many customers expect stores to offer free Wi-Fi access, giving retailers the opportunity to break the deadlock that occurs when consumers do not have the information they need to make a buying decision. When shoppers are in store, instant gratification often trumps a small difference in price, leading to increased sales and customer satisfaction.

However, the power of mobility doesn’t stop there, as it has the ability to bring the online and offline experience together. Retailers of the future will use intuitive technology and business intelligence data to interrogate a customer’s buying history and interactions to offer a personal experience.

## EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE FOUR KEY CHALLENGES

### 1. SYSTEM CONSOLIDATION FOR CONNECTED RETAIL

Connecting your brand with your customers has never been more important – or difficult. Retailers recognise the need for operational systems to communicate with each other in order to drive process efficiency and, ultimately, enable them to focus on customer-centric activities.

With multiple store locations and communication channels for customers and staff alike, there is the potential to enrich the overall customer experience, maintain consistency across channels and customer touch points, deliver significant cost-savings, and increase business agility in a dynamic market place.

“Connected retail” offers a strategic approach based on a single, unified platform and a common set of easy-to-use tools that simplify the network, making it easier to connect with customers, achieve better staff productivity, and optimise customer service.

By using the network as the platform, retailers can integrate access to information for every user, including employees, customers and suppliers. Security, management, rich connectivity, video, media, mobility, voice, and identity services are enabled in the network itself. As a result, you can provide your users with access to the information and people that they need, at any time and with any device. With network-based services available to all devices, retailers can execute new retail strategies and implement new applications far more rapidly, easily, and cost-effectively than before.

Many retailers are also seeking ways to improve the productivity of their retail managers and store associates. By simplifying on-boarding, administrative and task management processes, retailers can free their teams to spend more time with customers, learn more about products, or improve their sales capabilities. And all of these improvements have a secondary benefit of improving customer service.



**EVALUATING THE  
IMPACT OF THE  
FOUR KEY  
CHALLENGES  
CONTINUED**

Connected retail strategies drive system integration, allowing inventory, pricing and product information to be checked in real-time - a vital development, as inventory and POS systems are the lifeblood of a retail business. Of equal importance is the integration of back office systems including Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), HR Management, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Supply Chain Management and logistics apps<sup>4</sup>.

The real value in integrating business applications is to build intelligence about a retailer's operations that will drive effective inventory management, reduce costs and improve cash flow. In addition, by adopting a connected retail model, retailers can build a 360-degree view of the customer, allowing them to make data-driven decisions that drive sales, attain differentiation and achieve loyalty.

Challenge	Solution
Improve customer communication and satisfaction.	<p>Introduce the infrastructure to support on-demand access to information and omnichannel communications.</p> <p>Implement UC contact centre solution to empower “super agents”, resulting in improved collaboration and call handling.</p>
Achieve integrated department collaboration while simplifying network maintenance and management.	Converge data, voice and video onto a single-platform solution to achieve a 360-degree view of the customer.
Achieve business transformation without capital outlay.	Consume communications services on a utility pricing model or proven lowest Total Cost of Ownership (TCO).
Deliver a scalable communications platform to manage future growth aspirations.	Implement Unified Communications (UC) strategy delivering cost-effective, scalable services.

**EVALUATING THE  
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FOUR KEY  
CHALLENGES  
CONTINUED**

**2. CREATING ENHANCED OMNICHANNEL INTERACTIONS**

A core objective of an omnichannel strategy is to provide the tools to enable customers to discover, connect with and understand more about a brand<sup>7</sup>. Offering click and collect, online purchasing and free in-store Wi-Fi provides multiple transaction methods that offer maximum flexibility and convenience to customers. In return, retailers hope that providing multiple options of where and how to purchase will better position them to convert browsers into buyers.

Retailers must offer innovative ways to engage with today's digitally-savvy customers, providing clear product information, advice and support across multiple channels without compromising brand consistency and quality. The ability to deliver "what the customer wants, when they want it" represents a major challenge - and opportunity – for sales and customer service teams.

Of course, the focus for retailers goes beyond engaging and winning new customers. Customer lifetime value (CLV) remains a key performance metric, illustrating required spend for customer acquisition and pinpointing the customer segments that are delivering the greatest profit.

Implementing an omnichannel strategy can be challenging for retailers to execute, particularly for those with a foundation in bricks and mortar retailing, and is made all the more complex due to legacy technologies and information silos.

Maximising cross-sell and up-sell opportunities remains critical, but can only be achieved with a 360-degree view of the customer. The growth in digital technologies and channels has meant that businesses have access to more customer data than ever before. But it's not just about the information collected, but rather the actions taken when access to this rich seam of customer intelligence is mined. The critical step is to capture and analyse customer data, making it available to the right people within their retail environment as actionable insights that help engage with individual customers more personally and productively.

While many retailers already collect customer information on what, when and how they buy, much remains locked in a multitude of disparate databases, spreadsheets and operational systems. Without the ability to interpret the information and use it to reflect how they interact with a customer in the future, the data itself has limited value.

Getting an omnichannel strategy right creates a virtuous circle: happy customers spend more, become valuable brand ambassadors and repeat customers; in turn, this delivers a far greater return on the investment required<sup>5</sup>.

**EVALUATING THE  
IMPACT OF THE  
FOUR KEY  
CHALLENGES  
CONTINUED**

Challenge	Solution
Embrace digital innovation without compromising productivity and customer service.	Implement an integrated omnichannel communication solution in line with existing working practices.
Understand customer needs and preferences, achieve customer intimacy, maximise up-sell and cross-sell opportunities and maximise revenues.	Deploy advanced communication technology that integrates with existing line of business applications to achieve a 360-degree customer view to maximise sales and achieve greater retention.
Deliver a consistent customer experience regardless of communication channel.	Implement mobility and contact centre solutions that integrates all communication channels and core systems to gain a 360-degree view of the customer.

**EVALUATING THE  
IMPACT OF THE  
FOUR KEY  
CHALLENGES  
CONTINUED**

**3. ACHIEVING CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE IN THE  
CONTACT CENTRE**

Optimising contact centre performance is a fine balancing act. On the one hand, achieving the balance between human interaction and the convenience and efficiency of automation is important. On the other hand, retailers must reduce the effort for the customer by ensuring they have ease of contact via their chosen method of communication, whether that is SMS, webchat, social media or telephone. This is vital in order to deliver a robust service experience via the customer's chosen channel of interaction<sup>8</sup>.

It's essential that agents have a 360-degree view of the customer and are armed with the tools they need to answer questions submitted by various forms of communication. Quick and easy access to key information, accessible via consistent functionality and interfaces across the business, aids collaboration, confident responses and more interactive customer relationships. It also empowers super agents to make instant decisions based on hard data, including offering refunds or more loyalty points, which enhance the customer experience.

UC technologies can significantly improve first call resolution via intelligent call routing, leading to a reduction in call waiting times and allowing more calls to be handled. Ultimately, this improves staff utilisation and helps with the delivery of a better customer experience.

Adding agent seats needs to be cost-effective and easy to implement with minimal IT or third-party involvement for maximum flexibility. Therefore, ease of system management and scalability are key factors in supporting growth plans and maintaining optimal customer service.

The ability to view real-time management information and accurate analytics are vital to improving performance and can include visual and audible threshold alerts on critical conditions and reacting to higher call abandons or lower traffic by bringing agents in or taking them out of queues. Comparing this information with historical data will give a better understanding of trends to plan staffing levels while scheduling agent availability accordingly to streamline call flow, which avoids the need to add to the headcount.

In addition, first-rate disaster recovery provision is a prerequisite. to ensure minimal risk of business disruption.

**EVALUATING THE  
IMPACT OF THE  
FOUR KEY  
CHALLENGES  
CONTINUED**

Challenge	Solution
Deliver a scalable communications platform to manage future growth aspirations.	Implement Unified Communications (UC) strategy delivering cost-effective, scalable services.
Achieve integrated department collaboration.	Converge data, voice and video onto a single platform solution to achieve a 360-degree view of the customer.
Improve customer communications and satisfaction.	<p>Introduce the infrastructure to support on-demand access to information and omnichannel communications.</p> <p>Implement contact centre solution to improve collaboration and call handling.</p>
Achieve business process integration.	Deploy IT infrastructure and communication tools that work seamlessly with existing systems.
Achieve accurate management reporting to inform effective business decision-making.	Deploy communication platform across all channels, gaining accurate analysis of key business processes and customer interactions.
Embrace flexible working for agents, irrespective of location and time zone, without compromising productivity and customer service.	Deploy Unified Communications (UC) with mobility, delivering cost-effective, advanced tools and scalable services.

**EVALUATING THE  
IMPACT OF THE  
FOUR KEY  
CHALLENGES  
CONTINUED**

**4. IMPLEMENTING MOBILITY FOR ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT**

While there is huge potential for retailers willing to communicate with their customers in the online and mobile world, the key to success is to ensure mobility fits into the overall brand offering. As more customers turn to their phones and smart devices to make buying decisions, retailers need to move beyond just offering a mobile app. The best mobility strategies are designed with the customer in mind, delivering meaningful and relevant content at the right time and at the right place, whether in-store or online.

Linking customer data with smart devices empowers employees to build better, more meaningful relationships<sup>7</sup>. For example, what if sales assistants had smart devices that showed purchase history, preferences, product information, competitive prices and detailed information about the customer available to them on the shop floor, enabling them to offer a highly personalised experience? Instant gratification often trumps a small difference in price<sup>9</sup>, allowing retailers to counteract “showrooming”, where customers seek advice in-store then purchase online from a low price competitor<sup>10</sup>.

Retailers who operate both bricks and mortar and online stores need to ensure they can compete effectively as retailers who operate purely online. Achieving digital parity requires the use of mobility technologies to deliver the convenience and personal interaction offered by the online experience to the shop floor.

In addition, using mobility in-store to streamline functions such as ordering and inventory, by providing information where and when it is needed, enables quicker, smarter decisions and the ability to solve issues on the spot<sup>9</sup>. By integrating mobile with back office systems and enabling cross-channel consolidation, systems will be able to speak to each other and deliver valuable information when and where it is needed.

Deploying mobility delivers numerous benefits, including lower customer acquisition costs, increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, enhanced revenue and, critically, improved staff productivity<sup>9</sup>. However, a further vital consideration is anticipating when and where customers want to interact and this will be fundamental to offering a personalised service that engenders loyalty, rather than being viewed as intrusive. Retailers must ensure that they have the IT and communications infrastructure that supports appropriate and relevant interactions with customers, based on their chosen channel and at every stage of the customer journey. Flexibility is key, giving staff access to simple to use, but powerful tools, information and working practices that mean they can respond efficiently; a one size fits all approach to meeting customer demands will no longer be sufficient.

**EVALUATING THE  
IMPACT OF THE  
FOUR KEY  
CHALLENGES  
CONTINUED**

Challenge	Solution
Empower employees to build stronger customer relationships while streamlining and enhancing communications.	Adopt an application-based, single device approach supporting voice, video, presence, instant messaging, etc. This should be capable of supporting a BYOD strategy.
Deliver a scalable and flexible communications platform for all employees, irrespective of location, time and working mode.	Implement Unified Communications (UC) strategy delivering cost-effective, scalable services.
Deliver personalised customer communications, products and services geared to the customer journey and achieve customer satisfaction.	Introduce Unified Communications (UC) platform to support on-demand access to information, omnichannel communications and enhanced customer service.

## UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS - A STRATEGY FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

“Utilising a true omnichannel communication solution ensures a consistent experience, irrespective of the channel used, giving retailers the ability to deliver a highly tailored customer journey.”

### MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Unified Communications (UC) breaks down the barriers between different methods of communication, so that individuals can communicate easily and seamlessly with each other, no matter which device or medium they choose.

Through a single, intuitive client, end-users take control of all their communication methods (voice, video, instant messaging), offering the ability to work smarter, across multiple channels and international borders in collaboration with each other. Ultimately, an effective UC solution helps retailers to drive collaboration and productivity across the supply chain, from procurement, marketing and store management to warehousing, finance and HR.

By integrating Unified Communications (UC) to optimise business processes, retailers can deliver improvements in the customer experience and efficiencies that in turn increase sales and create differentiated products and services within the market. Retailers can leverage UC to enhance communication at every level of the purchase cycle, to improve the customers' shopping experience and drive loyalty. In such a competitive environment, customers are likely to become repeat buyers if their expectations are exceeded.

The benefits of seamless communication and collaboration are game-changing, especially in the retail sector where effective communications are vital to customer satisfaction and employee productivity. Whether it is handling enquiries, collaborating to resolve issues or aiding personalised customer interaction on the shop floor, the utilisation of powerful, yet simple to use and manage communication solutions are a necessity. Here are a few examples of why retailers communicate better with UC.

### SINGLE-PLATFORM INTEGRATION

Retailers using UC solutions benefit from having services converged on a single platform as it can be fully integrated with other critical line of business applications, including ERP, EPOS, Web, Chip and Pin, procurement, CRM and stock management. This is particularly useful for retail chains and franchises, allowing for faster collaboration and one-stop management and visibility across the entire communications infrastructure.



## **UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS - A STRATEGY FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE CONTINUED**

“Contact centre software can be easily customised and integrated into the overall communications platform, giving staff a 360-degree view of relevant customer information, presented on one screen.”

### **PERSONALISED CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS**

UC integrates all communication channels into a seamless experience, empowering customers to communicate in the way they want and by their preferred communication channels. Utilising a true omnichannel communication solution ensures a consistent experience, irrespective of the channel used, giving retailers the ability to deliver a highly tailored customer journey.

By integrating UC with back office systems, contact history is clearly visible, leading to faster access to information and the speedier resolution of queries. This is critical within the contact centre, where customer communication can be routed to the most appropriate agent. In-store, transaction history, preferences and other customer information can be made available via smart devices. Both will result in the delivery of a highly personalised customer experience which leads to greater trust, loyalty and sales.

### **COMPANY-WIDE COLLABORATION AROUND THE CLOCK**

The impact of effective staff collaboration on productivity and competitiveness cannot be underestimated. Get it right and staff are empowered to handle customer enquiries more effectively, while the speed of commercial decision-making can be greatly enhanced, allowing the retailer to respond swiftly to trends and market forces. Get it wrong and customer service, brand reputation and sales can be compromised. Relationships and productivity improve when teams can be focused and responsive. Rich presence functionality ensures employee availability is clear and transparent for all staff, enhancing communications between teams and customers, no matter their location and time zone.

Having a common user interface for a breadth of collaboration capabilities – video, file sharing, instant messaging, on-the-fly conferencing – speeds project planning across multiple locations and allows employees, customers and suppliers to communicate spontaneously and fully.

### **CONTACT CENTRE ENHANCEMENTS**

Contact centre software can be easily customised and integrated into the overall communications platform, giving employees a unified and 360-degree view of relevant customer information required, presented on one screen. This is particularly beneficial for retailers as they expand operations overseas and across multiple locations. Presence capabilities combined with intelligent call routing will help to achieve higher first call resolution.

### **REDUCED IT STAFF COSTS**

By using a UC platform, businesses can focus their IT staff on strategic, mission-critical tasks, instead of monitoring and managing complex and disparate communications systems.

**UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS  
- A STRATEGY FOR  
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE  
CONTINUED**

“Communication can switch from an instant message to a phone call or video conference on the fly with drag-and-drop ease, saving time and allowing users to focus on core tasks.”

**CONSOLIDATION AND SCALABILITY**

Where multiple legacy systems are in use, the number of service providers required to manage a piecemeal communications platform creates an IT and administrative nightmare. UC eliminates multiple service provider contracts and consolidates the entire communications infrastructure into one bill.

In addition, as retailers open new premises or launch new products, the communications platform is easily scalable. UC empowers organisations to scale their operations seamlessly and efficiently without overburdening the IT department or incurring ad-hoc or unplanned costs.

**SIMPLIFYING COMMUNICATIONS FOR USERS**

UC transforms the user experience by improving productivity and enabling more efficient workplace collaboration. At-a-glance availability and click-to-call functionality are embedded within an easy-to-use, common interface, so users can connect whenever work demands it. Communication can switch from an instant message to a phone call or video conference on the fly with drag-and-drop ease, saving time and allowing users to focus on core tasks. The results include faster decision-making, extended opportunities for collaboration and more effective communications.

## UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS – THE CRITICAL IMPERATIVE FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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Increasing pressure to meet evolving customer demands, deliver personalised customer communication, enhance contact centre efficiency and reduce costs are contributing to a revolution of the retail sector.

Responding to these challenges requires innovative thinking, a comprehensive review of business practices, and a willingness to investment in best-of-breed communication technologies. Retailers need to consider their business aims, objectives and values carefully, while gaining a detailed and accurate understanding of the customers' requirements, in order to establish the most critical outcomes required.

Future priorities are to improve the use of advanced technologies in order to standardise business processes and achieve cost savings. Attracting and retaining loyal customers is a high priority, so retailers must invest in a communications infrastructure that supports personalised, effective and consistent service delivery across multiple channels. Equally, staff need easy to use tools with a common interface to simplify day-to-day tasks and make collaborative working straightforward.

Implemented efficiently and properly, UC delivers significant ROI and must be viewed as a game-changer by those seeking to increase business agility, decrease operating costs and improve customer service. Ultimately, UC provides retailers with a robust communications framework to enhance customer engagement, take the customer experience to a new level, empower greater staff collaboration and drive growth and greater market share.

## **ABOUT INCOM BUSINESS SYSTEMS**



Incom Business Systems designs award-winning business communications solutions that enable people to collaborate and work more effectively, while reducing operational costs and capital expenditure. Our client-centred approach is matched by our expertise across voice and data convergence, contact centre technologies, business mobile, cloud telephony and IT infrastructure services. This enables us to address the evolving requirements of SMEs, multi-national enterprises, Not for Profit and government organisations. Since 1989, Incom has been the trusted partner for thousands of clients across the UK including Bonmarché, Brown Bag Clothing, The Range superstores, Haribo, Audi, VW, Citroen and Woodhouse Clothing.

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