

# Why creating an excellent customer experience has to be about more than just the customer

Retail is, now more than ever, a fiercely competitive industry. Consumers expect a lot from their shopping experience and retailers must deliver if they are going to stay on top. A combination of advanced data analytics, the rise of mobile, and the emergence of a new breed of retail powerhouse – led by Amazon – has left many retailers struggling to keep up.

The way that consumers interact with retail brands is changing rapidly.

Research from the CBI revealed that in the UK, between 2010 and 2012, mobile commerce had risen by 312%, and as the landscape continues to shift, there are more and more casualties among those struggling to keep up. More than 1,000 stores have disappeared from our high streets this year alone, and, by 2020, are expected to fall in number by a further 31%.

For retailers, the key to survival in this cutthroat environment is to ensure true customer centricity and the ability to respond quickly to shifting customer demands. They need to work with systems that have the in-built flexibility required to respond to trends and even anticipate future demands and changes in the market, as well as enable a more personalised experience. This requires access to accurate information and the ability to communicate that vital intelligence to the right people, at the right time. The challenge lies in delivering this without increasing the cost and risk to the business.

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## Five key pillars for building excellence in customer experience

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- **Understanding the ecosystem**

An excellent customer experience demands an optimised ecosystem across marketing, supply chain logistics, merchandising, and in-store and channel operations. The retail mantra is 'right product, right time, right price' but for that to be delivered there has to be integration between all the different elements from supply chain through to PoS, merchandising and even back office.

- **Measuring your effectiveness**

There are a million ways to spend your money especially when it comes to marketing activity. With so many channels and a multitude of different tools at your disposal the possibilities are endless. It is vital that you are able to measure the effectiveness of different campaigns and investments to ensure you are measuring 'slow movers', understanding the impact of promotions and ensuring insights are being shared so that key learnings are taken and rolled back into the planning moving forwards.

- **Omni-channel**

Consumers no longer think in terms of channels and it is time we stopped too. Today's consumers move seamlessly between them, perhaps using a mobile to research availability and pricing before heading in store to make a purchase; or maybe 'showrooming' and then moving back online to ensure they are getting the best deal. Consistency is critical here – the experience and the information has to be the same wherever they are.

- **Personalisation and customer control**

Personalisation has gone from being a nice to have to being critical. Consumers are now in control and they have come to expect that information they receive from companies through any channel will be relevant to them. This starts with having the ability to mine the customer data that you have to provide insight into who the customer is, what their history looks like and therefore what their preferences are likely to be moving forward. The consumer is also looking for a good experience. This is about making it easy for them to interact with you and to find and get hold of the things they want even if they are 'channel hopping'.

- **Flexibility**

This is especially important in-store where retailers can no longer assume one size fits all. Again this comes down to good analysis of the data and developing a picture as to what it is selling where, when and what the nuances are in any given location. Clearly this kind of insight has a huge impact on merchandising, store format, ABC grading and seasonal flows.

There is no question that at the same time customer experience has become so critical, it has also become much more complex to deliver. The key is finding a partner that has the combination of sector specific business experience with a deep understanding of what the technology is capable of delivering. You also need a technology that has the right combination of pre-configured software to make it fast to deliver, combined with the ability to augment according to specific requirements as needed. Finding the right partner with the skills and the right technology will go a long way to helping you cut through the complexity.

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