Internet Retailing

Citrix™

The digital transformation of retail

Changing how we work and how we shop, with an agile organisation for a hybrid world

INTRODUCTION

For today's increasingly hybrid shoppers there is no digital or physical, there is just retail – retail that is low-friction, engaging and available wherever and whenever they want it.

To meet these changing consumer demands – and to be ready for whatever changes may still be to come – requires retailers to be more agile and more flexible than ever before. While technology has helped consumers embrace new ways of shopping, so too can technology be used to help retailers themselves deliver the experiences consumers need, upskill their staff, managing their operations and creating efficiency gains for the short, medium and long-term.

Looking at how to free staff to work more flexibly in-store, online and even across the back-office is as much a part of retail strategy in the hybrid age as delivering hybrid services to customers has become. This encompasses technological and cultural changes right across the retail business, starting with managing and enabling store staff, enabling remote working and liberating back-office staff to work not only in different locations, but across different functions of within the business. Flexible times demand flexible workers.

In-store, this ranges from giving access to better access to product information, inventory and other company-wide data. As stores become not only a sales platform, but also a local fulfilment centre, staff need to be able to not only service customers in person, but also deal with online orders and contact from other stores.

Across the back-office, too, there is an increasing need for more flexibility. Staff want to continue to work remotely, while businesses need the same staff to be able to work across different functions within the business, supporting on and offline operations.

Knitting this all together is an increasingly complex task for retailers, with IT, management and HR demands coming face-to-face with technology and cyber security challenges. In this white paper, we take a look at how consumers have become more demanding, what is driving that change and how retail businesses can use technology to create an agile organisation by making their staff more agile, their business processes more flexible and their businesses more resilient to change.

We hear from DeSigual, Lindex, M&S, Curries, Stadium and Liberty of London on how they have each used technology to evolve their businesses back-ends to offer front-end customers better, hybrid services and their staff the tools they need to operate in this new world.

Drawing on sector research and case study interviews, the report outlines what technology is needed, how to implement it and who is already seeing success with such strategies.

Paul Skeldon, Editor, InternetRetailing

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Rebuilding Retail
With a Digital Foundation

Find out why the time is now to rebuild retail with a digital foundation, that will:

- Accelerate your organization with future-ready IT

- Empower secure, distributed work and protect consumer trust

- Improve the employee experience for a better customer experience

Find Out More

EXPERT INSIGHT

Digital transformation has been front of mind for the retail industry for many years. But now more than ever, digitization is proving to be the only way forward for retailers to keep up in an increasingly complex and unpredictable world. This truly is a new era for retail, with digital at its heart.

The Covid-19 pandemic uncovered new priorities for retailers and employees alike – and it is clear that retailers must embrace digital technology and reassess their operations to respond to the changing needs of both and to take advantage of the opportunities ahead.

Digital transformation opens up a world of opportunities for retailers to do things differently and create points of differentiation. From optimizing customer experiences both online and in-store, to enabling flexible working for employees, to meeting new priorities with regards to sustainability, it's clear that retailers who embrace the digital solutions available to them will be the winners in an ever-changing and complex marketplace.

While the road ahead in a post-pandemic world may be full of uncertainties, one thing that remains clear is that customer experience will continue to be the steady driving force for continued success. For example, recent trends are proving that whilst consumers increasingly value sustainability with regards to their shopping practices, customer experience still plays the most crucial role in guaranteeing continued loyalty and trust.

This reimagining of customer experience that we have seen since 2020 will demand a radical new structure, culture, and approach with talent embedded at every level that can respond to today's world and today's customers. Delivering a good employee experience is key to delivering a good customer experience, and so attracting and retaining a workforce that is empowered, inclusive, and productive is going to be vital.

Retailers will need to consider reshaping their IT infrastructure as a necessary first step to enabling an optimized operational model. This will, in turn, enable an improved customer experience, help attract and retain talent, and allow for sustainability goals to be met.

Citrix solutions for retail streamline and unify all aspects of operations, data and insights across your organization, providing a unified experience for both employees and customers. Enabling high-impact, high-touch customer service, Citrix enhances productivity for store associates, headquarters, employees and remote staff, and delivers always-on in-store and online experiences to consumers, with secure unified commerce.

By empowering employees with the tools they need to provide consistently great service at every brand touchpoint, companies can build both loyalty from employees and brand trust with their customers. Armed with these tools, retailers will be equipped to not only tackle these urgent priorities, but to continue to thrive for years to come.

Christian Schwendemann
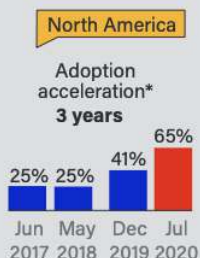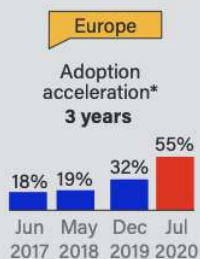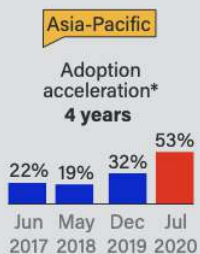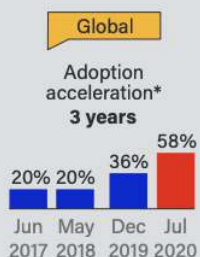**Go-To-Market Strategy Manager EMEA, Citrix**

citrix™

Citrix builds the secure, unified digital workspace technology that helps organisations unlock human potential and deliver a consistent workspace experience wherever work needs to get done. With Citrix, users get a seamless work experience and IT has a unified platform to secure, manage, and monitor diverse technologies in complex cloud environments.

THE DEMANDING CUSTOMER

FIGURE 1: Average share of customer interactions that are digital 2017-2020

- **Precrisis** (blue)
- **COVID-19 crisis** (red)

Global

Adoption acceleration*
3 years

Jun 2017	May 2018	Dec 2019	Jul 2020
20%	20%	36%	58%

Asia-Pacific

Adoption acceleration*
4 years

Jun 2017	May 2018	Dec 2019	Jul 2020
22%	19%	32%	53%

Europe

Adoption acceleration*
3 years

Jun 2017	May 2018	Dec 2019	Jul 2020
18%	19%	32%	55%

North America

Adoption acceleration*
3 years

Jun 2017	May 2018	Dec 2019	Jul 2020
25%	25%	41%	65%

*Years ahead of the average rate of adoption from 2017 to 2019

Source: McKinsey

How the consumer has changed

Lockdowns and working from home saw more shoppers shop digitally worldwide, as for many it was the only way to buy things, accelerating global online shopping by as much as 58% year on year, 55% in Europe [1]. However, it was just an acceleration of an existing process. Between 2011 and 2019, online shopping across all age groups saw steady growth. If we look just at 25-54 year olds, we see 50% of them shopping online in 2011, rising linearly to just shy of 75% in 2019. The pandemic in 2020 pushed this to 80%, where it has remained [2].

In practice, this has not translated into a wholesale shift away from real-world stores. In 2021, nearly 40% of consumers made a purchase in a physical store at least once a week, compared to just 27% who do the same online [3]. Consumers are also using mobile more as their primary means of online shopping. Some 41% say that they now shop daily or weekly using a smartphone, up from 39% pre-pandemic and just 12% five years ago [4].

While shoppers are still using stores – often to avoid delivery charges, to try things on and to make easy returns – they are increasingly also using online and mobile as part of their overall shopping process. According to data, 75% of them spend time browsing products online before they buy in a physical store [3]. These shoppers are also tending to 'showroom' more frequently, using their mobile device to buy what they have seen and tried on in-store digitally, often while still in the store. Pre-pandemic, 78% of younger generations shop both in-store and online simultaneously and are 34% more likely than older customers to use a mobile in a store [5].

And this is translating into increased spending overall. Consumer data from 2021 suggests that consumers are looking to spend more in the next six months, with 41% predicting increased spending on groceries, 33% on fashion and 30% on health and beauty [4].

How retail is responding

As consumer shopping habits have evolved, retailers and brands are now having to shift again how they craft their retail offering. Today, stores and brands that run stores are offering a more hybrid approach to retail, with click and collect, curb-side pickup and buy-online-pick-up-in-store (Bopis) all becoming not only key ways in which consumers shop, but also how retailers look to leverage their online and physical store footprint in unison.

This has led retailers to take a much more blended approach to how they sell, making sure that online/mobile and physical are more closely tied together than ever.

This has led to click and collect and Bopis (buy online, pick up in store) services climbing in popularity, as well as seeing retailers invest in store-to-web video services, video and chat-based customer consultation and helplines.

They are also revamping their entire marketing approach to better reflect how shoppers are coming to them through a range of channels – sometimes through the physical and digital at the same time. Retailers are also integrating more heavily their social media presence with their ecommerce and in-store offerings.

Altogether, this has led to a much more hybridised form of retail that requires retailers to be much more agile in how they service needs, with obvious impacts on technology requirements, staffing, training and more. ∎

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ENABLING STAFF IN-STORE

Innovating hybrid work

The changes seen across retail in the past two years have had a huge impact on staff – they need to be more flexibly deployed and skilled, as well as often having to work remotely or from home, across store and online customers and undertaking myriad tasks.

The macro trends

The retail industry, while having some specific challenges, largely mirrors what is happening in the wider world. The macro-trends in employment post-pandemic see more staff working remotely, more technology shaping how they work and a growing desire to be a part of the organisation, rather than just an employee.

According to data from Gartner following a 2021 survey, around 48% of the wider workforce will expect to work remotely in the months and years ahead at least part of the time. This compares to 30% pre-pandemic [1].

The other macro-shift that industry as a whole has seen from the changing way that businesses have had to operate is that there is now a larger emphasis on contingency workers. Many employees have lost their jobs over the course of the past two years, but many have been rehired on a contingency basis as businesses look to have in place a core staff and then a roster of workers to meet peaks in demand.

According to Gartner, 32% of business are doing this worldwide and it is leading to a rise in the use of technology to monitor staff performance, location and attendance. Analysis shows that 16% of employers are using technologies more frequently to monitor their employees through methods such as virtual clocking in and out, tracking work computer usage, and monitoring employee emails or internal communications/chat. While some companies track productivity, others monitor employee engagement and well-being to better understand employee experience [2].

That said, there is an increasing move to judge companies by the way in which they treat staff, with prospective employees and customers looking at the 'humanitarian' aspects of businesses before they apply to work there or give them their business. This is also shifting companies to make staff feel more of a critical part of the business than just an employee.

The impact on retail

Much of these tropes also apply to retail. However, the retail industry has the critical challenge that many of its 'front of house' staff – those that are customer facing – have to be present in the physical retail environment much of the time. The retail sector also faces the added challenge of many of these employees now also having to be part of the ecommerce process.

With stores being used as fulfilment hubs for ecommerce, the skill set needed by in-store retail staff is also changing.

So how can retailers address the need for staff working flexibly from home and remotely and having to keep stores staffed? While the two things are mutually exclusive, the answer lies in making in-store staff more autonomous and more involved in the innovation of processes and operations in store.

A survey in the US by Microsoft in 2021 found that 73% of store staff want to maintain the flexibility and more autonomous store role that they have enjoyed during the pandemic [3].

Much of this centres around the use of technology in retail – which we shall come to – but it also means that retailers have to redefine what omni-channel retail means in practice in 2022 and beyond.

Stores worldwide have been shut on and off for many months in 2020 and 2021 and, as they start to re-open, they are doing so into a new world where stores play a role in the overall customer experience across all channels.

New physical opportunities for retailers centre around the use of the digital technologies that have risen to the fore in the lockdown and retailers need to look not only at how to make that happen for consumers, but what it also means for staff.

Customers are looking for consistency across channels and that has to be delivered in stores as well as online – often both, sometimes simultaneously.

For staff and HR this has a number of challenges. For starters store staff need reskilling to be do this. Many are digital natives who will need to learn the ropes of dealing with customers face to face.

Others will be traditional store staff who need to learn all about the technology and how to use it in-store, deal with online questions, queries and orders and even get to grips with new inventory and order management systems, smart-device-based PoS and more.

By empowering employees to become multi-channel, cross-disciplinary, brand ambassadors, the organisation can become more agile and better able to respond to rapid change.

This gives rise to the second challenge: making staff more agile and able to move between online and in-store working. This can lend them the flexibility that they want – online roles can probably be serviced by home working to some extent – as well as giving variety to the job, making staff feel more integral to the overall, omni-channel business and giving them more digitla skills and self-development.

However, it does throw up issues with scheduling of staffing needing to be centralised and controlled so that it is run as efficiently as possibly and that staff can, as far as is possible, get the level of flexibility that they want.

Scheduling is also further compounded by the need to also manage contingency worker deployment. This not only involves managing where they work and bringin them, onboard in the first place, but also their training and general level of knowledge and understanding of the often rapidly evolving business.

The role of technology

Much of the change in how staff operate in stores and online is shaped by technology and will be delivered by technology. The rise of click and collect and BOPIS clearly link together online and offline services, but there is also the need to web-enable the store staff to bring ecommerce into the store, as well as how to tie together the inventory and stock movements of on and offline retail. So how does this work in practice?

- **PoS systems and ecommerce** – the biggest challenge for many retailers looking to operate in this new omni-channel paradigm has been how to make online and offline work together. The simplest solutions involve making the PoS in store part of the ecommerce process and moving towards letting staff have a view of online stock as well as in-store stock.

  However, it goes deeper. The key lies in having systems in place that link online and offline systems together and which unifies a range of processes across the organisation, Integrating online and offline transactions, inventory, and promotions across all in-person locations and online stores.

  Mobile will also be used for PoS systems. According to data from BRP, 84% of retailers were using mobile PoS by 2020, and 89% will be offering mobile solutions to their sales associates within the next three years [4].

  Arming sales associates with a mobile payment solution provides great convenience for customers by streamlining the sales process and eliminating the need to stand in line to pay. It also allows for greater engagement of customers on the shop floor, as well as allowing the collection of customer data. The mobile PoS also offers access to data to help the customer on the spot, aiding conversion.

- **Mobile** – While mobile is a buying channel in its own right, it is also increasingly a tool that glues together the physical and digital retail worlds, both for shoppers themselves and for staff.
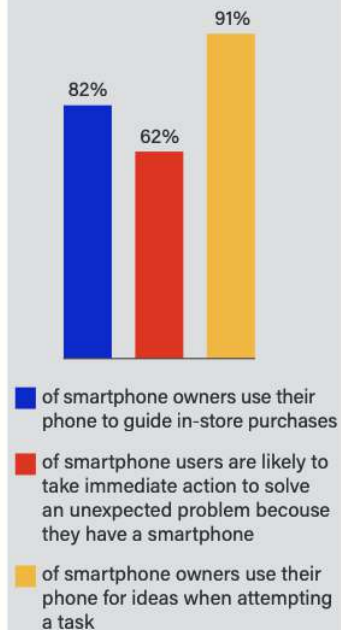
  Mobile is also becoming a key messaging channel for promotional activity and advertising to drive users to do all or any of this process, as well as driving shoppers into stores.

  From a store staff perspective, mobile connects and empowers staff. Digitally native shop workers are on their phones in their private lives all the time and work should be no different. The mobile is there to help them help customers, letting them access the web for information and data on products, stock, delivery and more.

  This ready access to information makes staff not only feel more empowered, but also makes them more efficient – not having to spend hours looking for data or calling up head office to check stock in other stores. In fact, research by Gallup finds that engaged teams are 21% more productive and can boost productivity by 22% [6].

  Moreover, it connects staff to the company. One of the drivers of retail jobs, as seen, is that workers want to feel empowered and part of the organisation. Mobile can allow that to happen. They can access and talk to head office, as well as interacting with colleagues to work out shifts and rotas and other employment issues. It also gives them greater access to training, as we shall see.

FIGURE 2: Consumer preferences for in-store tech

- of smartphone owners use their phone to guide in-store purchases
- of smartphone users are likely to take immediate action to solve an unexpected problem becouse they have a smartphone
- of smartphone owners use their phone for ideas when attempting a task

Source: Statista 2020

FIGURE 2: Digital consumer in-store phone use

- An in-store screen
- An app on their phone
- The store website on their phone
- A virtual reality booth
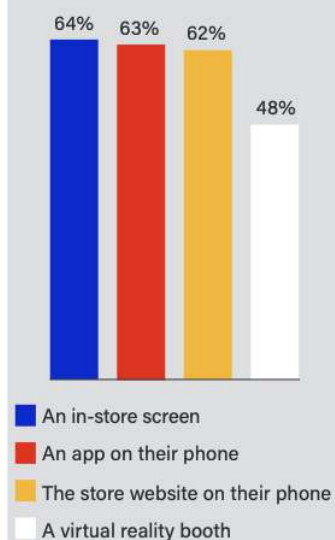
Source: Think with Google 2021

Guided working

Guided working is a relatively new departure for retail, where staff receive automated voice-based guidance to performing tasks as a means of training and to improve the flexibility of staff.

Typically, guided working uses a headset to talk a worker through the tasks they have to perform, directing them to where they have to go, what they have to do when they get there and where to head next. It will also talk them through any process that needs doing along the way, the filling out of paperwork and more.

Guided working can be used to semi-automate certain tasks that need to be performed by a person, but which can also allow different people to do that task with little or no training – making staff use much more flexible and helping to create a better balance between on and offline working with the same workforce.

This type of working practice is starting to see use in stores that are also now acting as fulfilment hubs and distribution centres, allowing staff to carry out a wider variety of tasks effectively and efficiently with minimal errors.

Such technology can be connected to enterprise management platforms and order management systems too, creating a rapid and accurate and above all safe way of working, while yielding the most out of staff.

Tasks such as pick and pack, order fulfilment and click and collect services are already suited to guided working, with productivity gains seen in organisations that have gone down this route.

Guided working, however, can also be used to help on-board new staff or re-deploy existing ones to new task and doesn't have to be voice based. Extensive tutorial videos and task instruction overlays on existing processes can be used to help talk users through how to use platforms and services – much like consumers are offered when they download new apps or software.

The dilemma, then for retailers, is how to deploy this, especially to remote workers. Do they deploy the whole desktop or do they just allow access to parts of it, or single apps? There is also the issue of how much access to intranets and other services staff and remote workers are offered.

The key is simplification. Offer the most simple and easy way to access what is needed – and only what is needed – so that it is clear what the user needs to do, as well as needing minimal guidance to do it.

- **AI technologies** – Retail thrives on data, covering stock, staff, promotions, customer details and more. As digital has become more entrenched in retail operations it has often become siloed across organisations. Even where it hasn't the large and growing quantity of data being accrued is unwieldy and becomes more challenging to dissect and use.

  Artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly needs to be used to parse and understand what the data is saying and how the retail business can use it across all channels. This can be applied to understanding everything from customer behaviour by channel, across all channels, by season – by any metric that may prove useful. AI can spot patterns and assess how consumers shop, what they buy and when.

  Going deeper, AI can also be used to help predict demand by, say, analysing social media traffic, previous data and even the news and weather. All this can help retailers shape how they create the right experience across stores and online and how they use these channels to drive shoppers to each.

  AI is also useful in determining how stock needs to be moved from warehouses to stores as it is able to more easily understand and assess the often fluid and rapidly changing picture across an omni-channel retailer.

  However, this should really all take place in the background – or at least the back office, as we shall see in the next chapter. For staff, they need to be presented with the upshot of this AI data analysis via their mobile devices, tablets and PoS systems in store, or through their ecommerce dashboard when working in the online realm, clearly and simply so that they are empowered to make the right decisions for their store and to help advise and aid customers.

  This customer service play can't be underplayed as it is now the key part of the role of staff across all facets of the omni-channel retail business and what increasingly can give one retailer competitive advantage over another. ∎

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Enabling remote working

The move to remote working, along with the surge in ecommerce, has sped up a change that was already underway for many retail businesses, but there are still challenges to making it happen.

For many workers, it may well be there first taste of remote working and so it will be very different way of working. It will also involve making sure they have the right equipment in place – not just laptops and smartphones, but also fast and secure internet connections and the right training to effectively understand and use the dashboards and systems that they are having to work with.

Typically, remote working can be broken down into three key factors:

- **Devices** – To enable workers to operate remotely, they need the right equipment.
- **Systems and services** – What programs and systems do remote workers need? As a business you need to look at what they will need to access and how and make sure that those things work on their devices.
- **Security** – While many staff now want remote working as part of their job, and with retailers seeing many efficiencies of letting them do so, it comes at a price: security.

With systems and customers spread across geographical distance, and staff using their own devices, often over public or semi-public networks, there is an inherent weakness to any organisations security. It is unsurprising that research suggests that more than half of business leaders see remote working as a greater security risk than in-house staff [7].
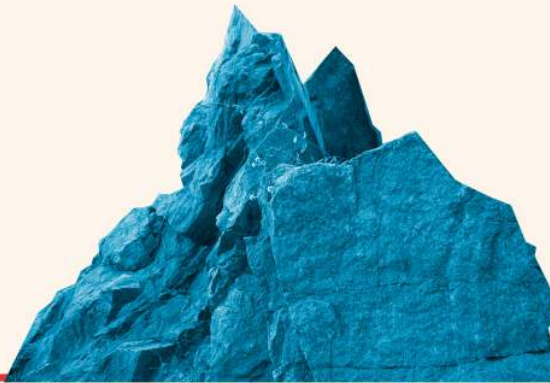
DIGITAL WORKSPACES: ENABLING THE FLEXIBLE BACK OFFICE

Managing agility at the core

Having seen how consumer demands and flexible working are shifting the working practices and pressures on staff, how does a retail business manage this process?

The agility that is needed within retail organisations needs to not only radiate across the whole business, but also needs to be effectively managed at the core to create the right environment for all staff to flourish and to meet the demands of the customer.

In practice, this means deploying the right technology for all staff that can deliver the right tools, apps, data and info to wherever they are – and as they themselves move across business functions – as well as helping to manage the devices on which they operate, manage security and managing logistics.

Retail organisations also have to consider how to train and manage back-office and front office staff in-store, in-office and remotely.

All together it is quite a challenge, so how what do retailers need to know?

Creating the right tech environment

Staff in the back office of any retail organisation are also increasingly looking to work flexibly and remotely. To do this, the organisation needs to create the right environment, technically and philosophically, to allow them to do so.

The first step is to look at what tools the business needs to offer its staff to create a productive environment for workers to interact regardless of location, device or network. It may be that you simply give everyone, regardless of where they are, access to all the same systems and information that they would get in the office. For some it may be that, restricting access to just the core apps and programs that they need to do their bit of the job can see them be more focussed and less overwhelmed.

The ideal solution is to be able to simply access what you need, wherever you are, at the touch of a button, be that as a remotely accessed desktop or through a dashboard that, once logged in, gives that user the access to what they need based on their location, device and task.

How this is done has to be guided by how you want your staff to operate and what you need them to do. It also has to fit with the devices they are using, the networks they will be working on and the level of security you need to instigate, as we shall see.

There are several factors at play here. The two that most businesses are aware of are the devices on which staff are accessing information and the network or networks over which that access occurs. However, there are more subtle considerations that also need to be factored in: the apps that are used and who has what access to which data and services within the company.

Any, any, any...

The answer lies in the 'any, any, any...' approach, which in essence allows any user on any device in any location to access any app for any work type without it being a security risk to the company.

The idea is that any user be they an employee, a contractor, business partner, part-time seasonal worker and, in the case of retail, customers, can access the company's systems and services that they need from wherever they are, using their own devices and running their applications to, in the case of staff, do whatever work they need.

The challenge is to make sure that this is delivered securely, with not only the risk of cyber breaches minimised, but also that the user gets access at the level and depth that their job requires.

This means having a holistic vision of security so that the user gets what they need, does so quickly and simply. New starters, contractors, seasonal workers and those swapping roles internally need to be able to simply access what they need there and then to do their job and that needs to be served to them securely and simply regardless of their device, location or network.

Digital workspaces

How do you do this? The answer lies in the creation of secure digital workspaces. This is a framework that

brings together all the relevant apps, data and end-points of a retailer's IT assets and allows them to be managed and controlled centrally and served up to users wherever they are, on whatever device they are using securely and swiftly.

In effect, it brings all of an enterprise's digital resources into a single, cloud-based location with secure access that allows any device to have secure access to those services over any network, because it decouples the client device from the workspace and delivers to the device on its own secure app.

The benefits are just as you'd expect. It allows for access to the right content and services to the right people to be readily managed, all the while protecting the integrity of the company's cyber security as, regardless of device, network or user, what they get is secure access to secured information.

The advantages a digital workspace strategy deliver are many fold and are the key to creating the flexible environment needed for many retailer businesses to create the flexible working and omni-channel customer experience that the modern shopping idiom demands.

It also solves the expensive problem of redundancy. With business-critical services sitting at the heart of many retail businesses these days, the need to have all systems living on several severs to allow for fail-over has become a trope that drives many IT budgets. Shifting to the cloud can see this problem removed, with the services living securely on third-party servers out there in the web, with no need for the business to have expensive backups and redundant systems in places. This can be a significant saving to most businesses.

Digital workspace advantages

The obvious advantages of a digital workspace approach is that it readily offers the improved working experiences staff now demand, allowing the easy delivery of remote working support, enhanced user experience and allows for easier management of remote workers.

However, it goes further. A digital workplace strategy can do away with the need for a VPN, offering a more secure alternative to this way of networking, securing the apps and work, rather than trying to secure a raft of networks. This allows for the protection of the business's key assets – such as apps and data – regardless of where people are working and, moreover, it delivers single sign-in and single click use that many staff are used to in their interactions with commercial apps and services in their non-work lives.

The strategy also has huge advantages for the IT department. At a stroke it can modernise the whole IT approach, allowing not only remote worker access, but also through data analytics allow for the prediction of behaviour and usage that can help streamline the way networks, servers and access need to be run and maintained.

It allows for the creation of microapps, built to match the needs of the company and the users and, being cloud-based offers a raft of service and power efficiency gains.

The role of third parties

The demands of a flexible back-office working strategy across the whole business, not least IT, makes it sensible to look at how to roll-out such a service not through internal IT, but through a managed service approach that can create a bespoke flexible working solution.

While the IT department naturally has control over the internal process of the company – and this applies across both back office and 'front of house' staff in retail – they are needed to be focussed on making it work day-to-day. The implementation and management of the tools that can share desktops, documents, access to the right data and services, making sure that remote devices and networks are secure can be handed over to a third-party to allow IT departments to manage the core tasks and allows the retailer itself to concentrate on retail craft.

The environmental impact

Deploying a digital workspace-based approach not only confers the flexibility and agility needed by the modern business, it also has profound environmental impacts too.

From a pure energy-usage standpoint, most IT departments account for around 10% of a company's total energy use. The move to a cloud-based digital workspaces solution not only cuts this energy use, but also removes the need for repeated redundancy – which can lead to even more significant energy savings for the business.

Inefficient devices, internal IT systems and networks and unnecessary commuting can all also be reduced significantly. Commuting to work by staff accounts for 27% of all miles travelled. Taking all this away brings not only the flexibility needed, but also can deliver the kind of green company policies that not only save money on energy bills, but also attract customers to shop with your brand rather than another – bringing it back neatly to where we began: with changing consumer habits. ■
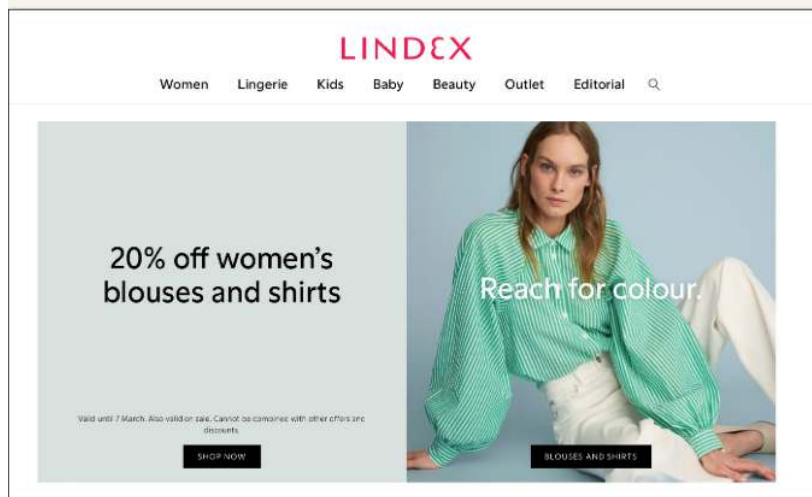
Lindex

Shoppers today expect a smooth experience, whether browsing online or in store. And as commerce becomes increasingly digital, Lindex, one of Europe's largest fashion retailers, wanted to create an innovative, integrated experience across its website and stores.

The Swedish retailer sells inspiring, affordable women's and children's fashion created from more sustainable sources in 490 stores across 18 countries. Its online business is growing but the e-commerce platform had limitations.

"It was not really built for today's e-commerce environment," Lindex CTO Florian Westerdahl explains. "Our online business is developing strongly and we sometimes had challenges managing peak periods."

"We want to give our customer a seamless brand experience and a consistent customer journey," he says "Not a scenario with an inaccessible site."

Westerdahl worked with Citrix and Citrix Service Provider Xenit to develop an innovative queuing solution using Citrix ADC, formely Citrix NetScaler. The solution improved the online shopping experience while handling the growth.

Today, people expect a smooth service. That's their baseline," Westerdahl says. "Nobody will stay around if the experience is poor. They will just move along to the next site."

With ADC, when web traffic approaches the limits of the Lindex e-commerce platform, customers are held in a short queue with a message telling them the site is busy. This way, customers understand and appreciate the communication.

"You may wait longer in line," Westerdahl explains,

"and you get a more positive experience. Citrix ADC has given us the ability to keep the e-commerce system handling a new-world workload. The site would not function without Citrix ADC."

Lindex recently won two prestigious awards for OmniChannel Retailer of the Year. The first, awarded by Scandinavian e-Business Camp, noted the retailer's early recognition of the value of an omnichannel approach and its focus on customer expectations. The second award, from Habit Modegalan, cited the company's "seamless, inspiring and user-friendly top-class shopping experience regardless of channel."

When Westerdahl and his team selected Citrix ADC, they were looking beyond the immediate need. With the urgent customer experience problems resolved, the team has had more time to design a powerful, next-generation e-commerce platform to replace the old system.

Citrix ADC is an important component in future-proofing the Lindex infrastructure.

"When we first looked at ADC, we saw it had a really good toolset that would enable us to do some very advanced problem-solving," Westerdahl says. "Citrix ADC gives us good data for customer segmentation, by location for example."

Improving customer service and winning omni-channel awards is about more than web traffic. With Citrix ADC, the 490 stores are all connected to the e-commerce site, enabling customers to collect web orders from their local store.

Citrix ADC also manages secure remote access for Lindex staff, helping them work more flexibly and while on the move.

"Fashion retail is going through a huge transformation," Westerdahl says. "It is changing the way we do business and means the whole company must be more agile. Citrix ADC has helped us extend our existing investment in e-commerce and allowed us to plan better for the future. We will be replacing a lot of technology as we move into the new world, but Citrix ADC will remain as the spider at the centre of our web." ∎

Desigual

International fashion brand Desigual was established in Barcelona in 1984 and currently has a workforce of around 2700 employees. It is present in 107 countries through 10 sales channels, 428 monobrand stores and six product categories: Woman, Man, Kids, Accessories, Shoes and Sport.

In 2019, in recognition of emerging consumer trends and consumption habits, the retailer started to transform to an omnichannel model that would provide the connected experiences its customers wanted with physical stores offering an immersive retail environment complimented by digital sales formats and faster point of sale service.

As part of this transformation, Desigual recognised the need to modernise and streamline communications and visual merchandising (VM) processes and compliance across its store network and, accordingly, deployed a mobile-first digital workplace management solution.

"We needed a solution that allowed us to centralise our task management and communications across our entire store estate, to ensure the customer experience and 'look and feel' of our stores was both consistent and streamlined," explains Eduardo García de Frutos, Head of Business Operations at Desigual. "Until then we had been using multiple, manual channels that were labour intensive. Crucially, these didn't allow for two-way communication between our frontline employees and head office, and meant we weren't able to capture and analyse the data contained in these transactions."

Following the initial deployment – and realising the value of the platform – the retailer began using it to streamline other key aspects of the business, from operations and maintenance to marketing, stock and finance, with each store now processing daily cash closures digitally.

"A lot of the information we are now able to track would have been impossible previously because of the internal resources it would have required to aggregate and track all of the information," says García de Frutos.

Transport costs have also been significantly reduced through the use of virtual shop visits by management, to ensure compliance of VM and other key processes.

Currently the retailer has more than 500 staff using the platform and to date more than 35,000 task-based missions have been completed and almost 400,000 store images shared internally, significantly improving overall visibility across its store estate.

"The platform has increased synergy across the business, not only in terms of operational management, but driving team and economic efficiencies," adds Garcia de Frutos. "Once the team experienced how easy it is to use and began to see the benefits it was extremely motivating to them. They enjoy having visibility across the network, seeing the innovations in other stores, how their own stores score and working on their action plans to improve on delivering customer experience. From a management point of view, this engagement provided invaluable insight from our frontline which in turn helps us streamline processes to constantly improve the environment and experience we provide to our customers."

"The biggest benefit of implementing the platform is we find the teams are much, much more engaged. We have better visibility of what's going on at the point of sale, and communication is much more fluid. We now have a constant feedback loop between the frontline workforce, our shop teams and the head office, and so we can adapt quickly as a result," concludes Garcia de Frutos. ∎

IKEA

As part of its long-term aim of becoming more convenient and accessible for its customers, both online and in-store, Ikea is piloting new store formats and retail ideas in the UK and China.

In the UK, the furniture and homeware retailer is investing £1bn in London to focus on developing new and existing ways to shop and to socialise. They include city centre stores, such as that opening today, and new fulfilment and delivery capabilities.

The first of the new Ikea stores has opening in Hammersmith in West London and is Ikea's first cashless store in the UK, with only self-serve checkouts available to buy the 1,800 products available to buy to take away, and a further 4,000 able to be ordered for delivery.

The store, which also features in-store planning services for kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms, is designed to be easily navigated by busy commuters - with three entrances and exits.

Ikea will then open a new flagship store in Oxford Street in Central London in Autumn 2023, and says that stores will continue to be an important part of its business model - both as places to browse and as fulfilment centres for multichannel services including click and collect and click and deliver. Collect Near You lockers will also open for shoppers to collect furniture items, costing £10 for customers who live within a 45km radius of a locker, or free for orders over £200.

Peter Jelkeby, country retail manager and chief sustainability officer at IKEA UK & Ireland, says: "Everything we do starts with our customers. Over the next three years, we will continue to transform as we respond to their needs and dreams, today and tomorrow. As one of the most innovative and exciting markets in the world for retail and ecommerce, we will step up our omnichannel investments in London with a simple goal: to become more customer centric, so that people can shop with us for a better, more sustainable life at home, whenever, wherever and however they choose."

Meanwhile, in Shanghai, China, Ikea is trialling a new "interactive and intuitive" retail experience that aims to bring digital methods in store, to tap into the new wave of omni-channel shoppers.

Digital services from Scan and Go to self-checkout and mobile food ordering sit alongside a series of new dedicated hubs in the newly renovated Shanghai Xuhui store.

Shoppers can register for events and book for design advice online, as well as using their own mobile devices to scan items – for more information or to add them to their basket – as they move around the store before using self-checkout to buy.

Customers at the new look store can ask local experts for advice at a maker's hub, where they can make and repair items or work on their own circular design projects. A design hub also features in-store advice, workshops and exhibitions, while a food hub offers the opportunity to test new ideas, such as urban farming. Each will function as a community hub, offering, says Ikea, "everything from cooking and yoga classes to home furnishing workshops, while staying true to Ikea's mission to create a better life at home within the limits of the planet."

The new store also moves away from the typical journey that leads shoppers through every part of an Ikea shop, with tills at the end the journey. Now, shoppers can get to a till to pay at any point. Play areas remain a key part of the design, as do restaurants and other food options. . ∎

New Arrivals
SPRING LAYERS

GANT

From its beginnings as a shirtmaker founded on the American East Coast in 1949 by Bernard Gantmacher, GANT is now a leading sportswear brand selling to men, women and children in more than 70 countries and 600 stores globally.

Like many retailers, GANT is in the process of reinventing its physical stores as spaces where it can connect its consumers with, as it sees it "wider storytelling around its brand proposition and heritage in addition to its product offering". As part of this the retailer is training its store staff and other customer facing colleagues to be more digitally engaged.

"Our in-store colleagues play such a pivotal role as they are the ones that meet and serve our customers every day," says Maria Klingh, Global Retail Director at GANT. "Their interaction with the customer creates an opportunity to engage and build a relationship. Therefore, it is crucial that we support them and we have been investing in processes and tools to facilitate a smoother employee experience giving them time to focus on the customer while in-store."

In 2020, GANT deployed a new mobile-first platform to streamline visual merchandising (VM) compliance. It launched a series of missions, delivered to staff on their mobile devices in the flow of work, communicating guidelines and providing a place to capture feedback and comments. This standardised process for capturing data provided visibility on VM compliance across local and global head offices, resulting in a much higher quality of visual execution with consistently high standards upheld in each store.

Building on that initial success, in 2021 GANT launched its training operation, the GANT Academy, on the same platform, creating a digital hub for communications, training and engagement which, currently, more than 2,000 store associates and retail leaders use. A dedicated 'inspiration' section of the Academy aims to help build retail experiences by providing diverse courses on music, art, and even Netflix content designed to support store teams to have interesting and meaningful conversations with customers that connect beyond GANT's product offering.

Additionally, GANT has used the platform to create the Academy Social Club where frontline staff share news and images, participate in competitions, all designed to foster engagement amongst the workforce and forge a strong, collaborative culture in its teams.

"One of the smart things the platform provides is the automated translation of comments into a user's native language so we overcome the language barrier, which is very present when you operate in a global environment. Now we have store associates in Shanghai chatting or giving tips or engaging with our store staff in Paris and this we really believe creates a sense of belonging and being part of a greater, global community," explains Klingh.

Today, 90% of GANT's retail employees use the system to learn, communicate and find information on a weekly basis, with 80% accessing the company's staff app on their private mobile and 20% using the retailer's in-store tablets. GANT has seen a 30% increase in completed training in comparison to its previous platform. This increase in direct communication between head and local offices and store floor employees results in an increase in knowledge, passion and engagement, says Klingh. ∎

Currys

UK-based electrical retailer Currys say that 60% of its UK customers now use its both stores and its website when they buy technology and electronics – and that has meant the retailer is never out of stock, that customers can get goods when they want them, with face-to-face advice always available, either online, via its ShopLive video shopping service, or in-store.

Currys group chief executive Alex Baldock believes that the "simpler, more focused business" that has been achieved through a well-advanced omnichannel transformation programme is now best placed to make the most of the growing importance of technology in people's lives.

"Above all, we're showing that in technology retail omnichannel wins," he says. "Yes, more customers are shopping online, and our hard work to build a strong online business has seen us thrive here. But most customers buy tech through both online and stores, our sweet spot, where we've worked hard to build on our strengths. That's paying off."

"We owe all this to our tens of thousands of capable and committed colleagues, 16,000 of whom received £1,000 of free shares in February, as we continue to make all colleagues shareholders. It's their skill and will that's keeping us on track for another successful year, and that's transforming Currys into a business to be proud of."

Currys rolled out new omnichannel platforms, including its new currys.co.uk website, during the year, with a focus on design, personalisation and easier navigation.

At the same time, the company offers services from face-to-face advice to fast fulfilment both online and in its stores. Its online ShopLive service offering advice has seen higher levels of satisfaction, conversion and average order values than unassisted online shopping, while 18% of online sales are no collected from a store via the Order & Collect service, with more than half of sales picked up on the same day.

In-store staff have also moved into its supply chain, while three of its distribution centres are now operated by logistics company GXO. Currys says customer satisfaction ratings have improved despite the challenges, with net promoter scores (NPS) up by almost five points in the UK market on two years ago.

"Pleasingly," says Baldock in the half-year statement, "satisfaction measured at almost all parts of the customer journey was up materially compared to last year. However, there is still a lot of work to go in this area and a lot of our energy will continue to go into fixing customer pain points." ■

M&S

UK department store M&S has seen its fortunes fluctuate wildly in the past decade, with the pandemic looking like it may deal it a fatal blow. However, the 100+ year old stalwart of the high street has had something of a Phoenix-like return to form, all thanks to using its well trained and highly qualified staff and live video.

Back in mid-2021 it launched M&S Video Expert service, enables staff from beauty and furniture departments to connect to customers shopping from home, offering convenience and flexibility alongside the service customers expect from the retailer. Initially, staff at M&S's White City store will be providing the service.

Then, in early 2022, the retailer added live broadcasts from its site to offer advice and information to customer worldwide. It also involves key influencers in its programming to help drive sales, especially in China.

M&S Video Expert combines M&S's retail expertise with Go Instore's unique live-video services and Appointedd's online booking and scheduling platform. The service allows shoppers to have one-to-one consultations with M&S experts from the comfort of their home and on demand via product pages on the website, informing their purchases before choosing to complete either online or in-store. "The last year has accelerated many of the trends and shopping patterns we were seeing pre-crisis and we have responded by building a shopping experience that's fit for the future, enabling customers to shop the way that they want. Our M&S Live Expert service helps us to offer our customers flexible, easy and rewarding shopping

experiences whether they choose to shop online, in-store, or both," says Clive Hudson, 10x Digital Store Programme Manager at M&S.

"The service has proven really popular, our in-store experts have taken over 9000 calls so far. What's more, connecting staff to online customers is increasing our conversion rates by up to 40% and receiving 92% consumer satisfaction scores. Our customers have booked a total of 500 appointments in just 3 months, demonstrating the high demand for our enhanced digital offering," adds Hudson.

The additional M&S Video Expert booking feature means customers can pre-book two-way personalised video calls with an in-store expert at a time of their convenience to discuss how furniture and beauty products will best fit their needs.

The service also enables M&S staff to deliver one-to-many interactive 'StoreStream' live sessions on their website, which allows an unlimited number of customers to join a live stream broadcast to learn more about the products as they are browsing. This allows M&S to reach a much wider audience, all whilst maintaining their high levels of customer service as customers are able to chat & ask questions in real time - a convenient, efficient, and modern omnichannel experience.

Shoppers who visit the M&S website can join a live broadcast hosted by a member of the M&S staff and an outside influencer in order to learn more about the ranges that they are looking at. They can ask questions through live chat, see products being demonstrated and buy as they watch.

The first live chat in January 2022 featured lingerie and activewear, and more will take place over coming months. Earlier live shopping trials saw customers stay online for more than 75% of the time. Live shopping will also give M&S a way to talk to its customers, helping it to raise brand awareness and perceptions of its styles, while gathering customer feedback.

Stephen Langford, director of M&S.com, adds: "Live Shopping on M&S.com is the latest in a wave of new initiatives we've introduced to improve our customer experience. It's a global trend that responds to how customers are using social media – we all know how much more we're scrolling and engaging with video content – at home, or on the go. Live shopping puts our experts front and centre and gives them the ideal platform to share the M&S point of difference – in terms of both quality, design and innovation features." ■
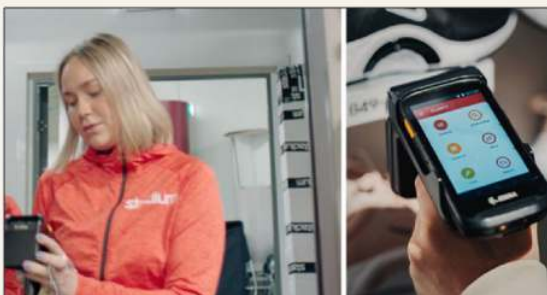
Stadium

Inventory accuracy is becoming increasingly mission-critical to retailers worldwide – not least with store stock being used to fulfil online orders, as well as being on sale to store shoppers. To meet these demands, technology is increasingly being deployed in different ways. One such solution lies in RFID tags that sit on shelf edges and can simply feed live information into a central database for inventory management.

Leading Swedish sports retailer, Stadium is using is one such retailer that has turned to using such an item-level RFID solutions, alongside enterprise software, to transform its inventory management and customer service.

Launched in 2018 with an initial pilot project, the RFID project at Stadium has seen the full deployment of item-level RFID technology across 180 Stadium retail stores in the Nordics, allowing the brand to count its stock in every store weekly,

instead of its previous once a year Stock Count.

Stadium is also using the RFID-enhanced Receiving and Sales Floor Replenishment features within its enterprise management platform®. As a direct result, Stadium has seen an increase in inventory accuracy from 70 to 99%, resulting in dramatic improvement in business performance across the chain.

Speaking about the transformation, Johan Stenström, Supply Chain Developer at Stadium, explains: "Before RFID, we had an unrealistic view of our inventory levels; due to our once-a-year inventory count and existing ERP software that didn't track lost, stolen, or damaged inventory, we thought our inventory accuracy was nearly perfect when it was actually around 70%."

Stadium launched an RFID pilot project in two of its Stockholm stores. The pilot proved so successful that Stadium began rolling the technology out to all of its stores and distribution centres, as well as began source and distribution centre tagging.

"We implemented the Clarity® solution in our stores to really help our personnel. The enthusiasm about using the technology was so palpable that other stores started calling us to move up their go-live dates," says Stenström.

Having completed the full deployment at the end of 2021, Stadium has now implemented SML's item-level RFID technology across 180 stores, using RFID tags, handheld RFID readers, and the Clarity software suite. Stadium boasts a 99% inventory accuracy level and has seen a significant increase in sales across the board.

Liberty London

UK luxury retailer Liberty is seen by many as the epitome of Christmas, with its flagship London store usually decked out with stunning and festive window display to draw in shoppers. The pandemic and reduced footfall saw the retailer having to rapidly rethink how it 'did' Christmas in 2021, looking instead to how to leverage its in-store expertise online.

As a result, the retailer brought its in-store agents online and onto social media to capture the physical delight of the in-store experience by bringing it over to their digital channels. And the lessons it learned are set to transform how it operates as an

omni-channel business for decades to come.

"One of the things we did online for the first time was to make our in-store agents available to customers online," says Eric Fergusson, director of ecommerce at Liberty, speaking in a RetailX webinar, RetailX & Guests with Liberty London.

Since enabling this functionality, which allows browsers on the website to converse with, or ask product-related questions to in-store staff, Liberty says it has been incredibly popular. "We realised we have a large cohort of customers who love having conversations with our fantastic staff and now they can have them digitally," says Fergusson.

Liberty has also seen a strong growth over the past three to four years, which has now accelerated to a three-fold in 2021. This is partly due to Christmas demand starting earlier than ever, with consumers buying baubles and home decorations from September.

He also says the retailer expects to see continued online growth in the new year, as the number of people working from home increases: "People have shopped online, found it convenient and people are going to be spending more time working from home than they did last year and those I think are the two norms that have persisted," Fergusson concludes. ∎