

# The Pain-Free Way to Make In-Store Wi-Fi Deliver Big Value in Retail

In the rush to meet customer expectations and keep up with competitors, many retailers have installed Wi-Fi in their stores on the unscientific basis of “build it and they will come.”

In today’s retail environment of intense competition and heightened customer expectations, this is never going to be effective. The truth is that if in-store Wi-Fi is selected, installed, and managed without proper expertise and focus, it will be no more useful to a retailer than an empty shelf.

Yet if it is installed and managed by providers who know what they are doing, are not tied to specific manufacturers, and have the experience to build a solution that matches the retailer’s requirements precisely, Wi-Fi will start to deliver.

It will give customers the better experience they seek, while providing retailers with more knowledge than ever about consumers’ shopping habits and what they get up to in store. Not only can retail operators start using the information to make real-time decisions, they will also have stores that are fully equipped for the retail revolution in which customers and staff will increasingly use mobile devices.



## Faster and more powerful

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It is important, for example, that retailers are able to take advantage of all the technological developments in Wi-Fi, which is now hugely faster and more secure than the systems of just 2 or 3 years ago. In fact, any retailer who has a system of this vintage will be providing their customers with an inferior experience.

Advances mean that Wi-Fi access points, for instance, now have a more focused beam that makes them more efficient and capable of handling five times more throughput than just a few years ago. This is not capacity for its own sake. It is designed to accommodate data streaming by the millions of potential customers for whom the smartphone is indispensable to their daily lives. Importantly, the extra capacity also enables retailers to send shoppers big data graphics illustrating products and eye-catching, timely offers.

## Spreading the word

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In many sectors of retail, operators have a wealth of information and graphics they can send shoppers about how to use or combine products, particularly in the food and fashion sectors, where taste and style are highly influential factors. In technology retail, shoppers are often crying out for a level of detail about specification, capability and alternatives that are impossible to accommodate on a shelf label.

Fashion, in particular, is an area where the development of applications is fast advancing. Customers using their smartphones are already able to superimpose clothing or accessories on their own image, giving them greater confidence and choice in their purchases. The Wi-Fi connectivity to support this needs to be sufficiently agile and robust, which is not a given with many installations.

Retailers have to accept that streaming on smartphones is now part of everyday life, with customers making more considered purchases wanting immediate access to product videos. Equally, if shoppers are with their partners or members of their family, the likelihood is that some of this extended group will want to log on to Netflix or other entertainment channels while they wait for their relative to decide what to buy. A retailer offering this facility reduces the chances of bored partners pressing the group to leave the store.

## A goldmine of data

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Offering Wi-Fi is not just about making it easier and better for the customer. The process of logging on gives retailers hugely valuable profile data about each individual customer and their shopping habits. If these consumers are persuaded to log on via their social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Google+, retailers not only gain even more information and the opportunity to conduct social analytics, they also have the chance to maintain a relationship with customers after they have left the store.

Triggered e-vouchers can, for example, be sent automatically to reward the loyalty of returning customers or to entice shoppers who only visit occasionally. Advertising links can also quickly be established to launch new products or boost the popularity of those already offered.

Besides getting to know customers so much better, retailers can learn more about how their stores are used. The tracking of smartphones from Wi-Fi access points will, for example, indicate peaks in footfall and give a store operator the ability to open up more tills at the right time, so that excessively long queues are never allowed to form and staff do not spend hours at the checkout unnecessarily.

## Enhanced security

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While there are obvious advantages to having Wi-Fi, many retailers understandably worry about security and fear they will end up funding a costly white elephant that is abused by the public and makes them vulnerable to hackers.

They should consider that, for a start, cutting-edge Wi-Fi systems give retailers the level of control they want so they are not burdened by constant management requirements but can, say, block bandwidth for the kind of troublesome timewaster who comes in to a large store purely to download for an hour via the Wi-Fi.

Security enhancements also mean systems automatically scan for rogue devices secreted in stores by criminals, enabling them to be removed before they intercept and divert personal or commercial data. This is a big advantage for retailers using or contemplating mobile point-of-sale devices where payment card data must be protected.

Indeed, Wi-Fi systems now come with levels of security that can be matched to retailers' needs, ensuring, for instance, that compliance with PCI requirements around payment data is ensured, with reporting on a daily or monthly basis as necessary.

Wi-Fi is also far more resilient now, so that even if the management platform goes down because of some external event, the access points continue to operate in secure mode.

## Keeping pace with change

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All this is very well, a retailer may say, but any system that is installed will be superseded by technological developments, requiring further investment in new equipment and more disruption after a short period of use.

Not so. Using an experienced provider on a managed services basis means that all the pain is removed. Since most contemporary Wi-Fi units require no individual configuration, installation is fast, with the provider building the right solution, irrespective of brand or technology. Upgrading of the technology then takes place as required, without the store operator having to go through the complex processes of scoping and procurement.

Yes, retailers can install an off-the-shelf system themselves and hope it delivers on the promises of the manufacturer. An objective assessment, however, soon reveals that the only real way to have a Wi-Fi solution that adds value and boosts revenue, is to use a managed services provider with broad knowledge of the technology, free of ties, and possessing deep and proven experience. That is how to monetise in-store Wi-Fi.

## Proprietary Statement

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