

# Multi-channel retailing brings the best of online shopping into the physical store

***With online retailers gaining ground over their physical competitors, more retailers are turning to a digital solution.***

With online markets gaining ground on traditional storefronts, major retailers are turning to multi-channel retailing in hopes of gaining a leg up over both their online and physical competitors.

More and more retailers are embracing these innovative technologies, and it's not surprising why—statistics show that in the UK, from January to August 2015, online retailers have seen an 11 per cent boost in sales, while physical stores saw a loss of 4 per cent in the same period.

## The online shopping experience, in-store

Many retailers are now striving to bring the online shopping experience into their stores, along with the customers who have become accustomed to it. Multi-channel retailing allows store owners to achieve a level of connectivity previously unseen on High Street.

Multi-channel retailing caters to modern shoppers and their companions—the smart phone, the tablet and other devices—by allowing customers to search for price comparisons, download up-to-date information on the products they're interested in and read product reviews and news, just as conveniently as they could while shopping online.

In addition to interacting with products, multi-channel retailing allows shoppers to log on to the business's Wi-Fi and access their own social media websites and other apps in-store—a feature more consumers are expecting to have when walking through the door.

Accessible Wi-Fi increases the customer's overall experience while in-store, as it allows them to entertain themselves during moments that would normally be considered downtime. Shoppers can access their Facebook news feed while waiting in queue, check Twitter while waiting for their order to be fulfilled or stream a song on Spotify while they wait for a relative to make up his/her mind on a big purchase.

For large retailers especially, proper use of multi-channel retailing can provide enormous benefits leading to increased sales and customer retention. A customer sitting down for a cup of coffee at the in-store restaurant, for example, could have updates pushed to their phone by the operator. These apps could include a restaurant menu which allows the customer to order without coming to the counter and worry about their shopping bags or laptop. If the Wi-Fi log-in requires them to sign on using one of their social media accounts—Facebook, Twitter or Google+—the store would be able

to collect data on their profile and their “likes.” Whatever the login method, gaining access to the store's Wi-Fi network should be simple and instructions should be prominently displayed wherever customers tend to linger.

The main goal of the multi-channel retailer is to encourage their customers to remain in the store for as long as possible, whether they are accessing the store's content or their own apps. The longer a customer remains in a store, the more exposure they will have to the products and the more likely they will be to leave with a purchase in hand, or in the case of the hospitality industry, the more food and drinks they will order.

## Connecting with customers

Digital signage has proven an effective tool in attracting the attention of shoppers. Using high-quality broadband, management can have complete control of content displayed on HD television screens placed strategically throughout a retail location.

The content displayed can be customised to reflect the demographics of the current customers, which is retrieved through their Wi-Fi interactions made while in the store. The content displayed can even be adapted to vary within different sections of the store, honing in on demographics that spend more time in certain areas.

The complexity of these displays is completely customisable. A single screen could, for example, display a stream of current events on the bottom while showcasing a new product or sale in the other segments.

Ideally, head office should allow some control of the digital signage to be in the hands of local managers, as content selected for individual locations has been proven to increase viewer attention.

Studies have shown unknowledgeable staff to be one of the top irritants for shoppers. Digital signage can play an important role in educating staff members and keeping them up to date with the newest products and developments. Placing a screen in a break room or office is an effective way to achieve a highly knowledgeable team and requires little effort on the part of staff.

A smart multi-channel plan has the potential to not only provide customers with easy access to the information they want, but to stoke their interest in products or services they were previously unaware of. While customers connect to the internet via in-store Wi-Fi, retailers can access valuable data that when used in conjunction with digital signage allows them to directly connect with the customers.

### Getting the most out of multi-channel

Multi-channel retailing involves the use of a powerful set of tools, which require proper installation and maintenance. In order to make the best use of these tools, the services of an expert installer are necessary. The right services provider can ensure retailers get the most out of these multi-channel solutions, providing them with an intuitive and hassle-free system void of any blind-spots or down time. When customers are not receiving the connectivity they expect, the buck stops at the retailer, not the system itself.

Multi-channel retailing – using Wi-Fi, digital signage and accessible connectivity – has the power to bring any physical store into the modern world. If used correctly, retailers can provide their customers with the best aspects of both physical and digital shopping. With the help of an expert provider, operating a multi-channel store can be made intuitive—allowing management and staff to focus on the customer.

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### About Hughes

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