

Smarter Working Britain:

The retail industry

Improved connectivity can empower employees to deliver a better service to customers and make way for innovative solutions in-store

O₂ business

Experiential Retail is all about using digital solutions, both within and beyond the four walls of the store, to help retailers attract, understand and engage with customers.

In an increasingly competitive market, retailers need to behave differently in order to attract customers and keep them coming back in store. Customers want to experience an engaging and personalised purchasing journey they simply cannot get elsewhere. That's where Experiential Retail comes in.

One element of Experiential Retail is empowering your employees to work more efficiently, serve the digital consumer better and develop more personalised relationships.

We wanted to understand the full impact of better employee connectivity on the retail

experience in the UK, so we commissioned a study with the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) into Smarter Working in the Retail Industry. The research uncovers exactly how benefits can be realised and where the biggest gains can be made.





Connectivity is key for retail

New technology is already changing the way we work, no matter what industry we are in.

Secure, real-time access to business systems allows employees who do not work in a traditional office environment to have the same 'office' benefits wherever they are.

In retail these employees may be buyers, regional managers and store operations staff who work from a variety of locations. These could include back-office administrators, stock room or goods received staff. Customer-facing staff on the shop floor will also benefit.

Connectivity by occupational types in retail

The respondents in this study can be segmented into **back-office** and **customer-facing** occupations. The results indicate that more than half of these two groups did not have access to the productivity tools they felt were important to do their jobs effectively.



Back-office roles

Individuals in these roles make up around 33% of total employment in large retail firms.

They include employees in managerial, professional, technical, administrative and distribution occupations. The main respondents to this study performed management and administrative functions such as supply chain management, retail operations, and category management.

Mechanism	Business outcomes
Meeting effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Access information in real time during meetingsFewer follow-up meetingsBusiness trips saved
Operational Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">More time spent with suppliers or at retail site locationsImproved responsiveness
Task efficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Complete tasks in real time during or immediately after meetings and scheduled jobsLess time taken when revisiting tasks at a later date
Remote working	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased productivity when working at locations other than home, head office and retail sites i.e. remote locations

The table above shows the benefits of improved connectivity that the retail industry is yet to realise.

Meeting effectiveness

88%

of middle managers report that team members are regularly forced to leave supplier, offsite or retail site locations because they do not have access to the business tools and information they require away from head office.

Task efficiencies

100%

of middle managers report that their team could reduce the time taken to complete post meeting/visit tasks if they had access to the right tools from the original location.

Remote working

100%

of middle managers report that with access to the right tools they expect their team to be more productive when working remotely.

On average, each retail employee spends approximately **54 hours a year** working from remote locations.

The results indicate that the average individual working in retail in a back office role would **save 135 hours per year** due to better connectivity.

According to Cebr these findings would also suggest Gross Value Added (GVA) improvements to retail worth **£530m**.

Productivity improvements from full access to real-time information per employee per annum	Hours
Meeting effectiveness: access the right tools and information from external meeting locations, reducing the need for follow-up meetings	38
Operational management: access corporate data and information when working from supplier, offsite or retail site locations	64
Task efficiencies: enter information or complete a task when working from supplier, offsite or retail site locations	33.5
Total	135.5

Source: Cebr data analysis

- However 64% of those who felt that access to information entry and update tools would help them to do their job effectively had little or no access
- Similarly, more than 50% of those who felt that information read and share tools were important to be able to work effectively had little or no access



Customer-facing roles

Unsurprisingly, customer-facing roles form the majority of the occupation types in retail, with approximately 66% of the employees working for large retail trade firms falling within occupations classified as 'sales and customer service'.

The results show that:

52% of customer-facing staff who felt that access to information entry and update tools was important to be able to do their job effectively, had little or no access

More than **50%** of those who felt information read and share tools were important to work effectively had little or no access

For these occupation types, retail middle managers reported that improved connectivity would result in:

An expected **16%** improvement in speed of serving and responding to customers

13% increase in meeting customer service standards as a result of better connectivity

14% increase in customer satisfaction

40% increase in sales

With the lowest levels of connectivity of any industry, retailers need to catch up fast

The study reveals that, across all industries, the retail sector has the lowest levels of employee connectivity. However, given the pressures retailers currently face and the increasing expectations of the digital consumer, they are rapidly recognising the need to change the way they operate.

We are beginning to see retailers such as John Lewis and Argos arming shop floor sales assistants with mobile point-of-sale tablets so they can instantly source and order items and access a range of product information for the customer.

And transactional tablets allow customers to make their purchase directly with the staff member who advised them, skipping queues at the till. These tablets can be integrated with till systems, allowing customers to either complete their purchase in-store or arrange home delivery seamlessly.

Never miss a sale

The specialist talks about the item that will best fit their needs to find a fast and effective resolution to the query.

Employees can focus on building a relationship, rather than leaving the customer to visit the stock room or waiting on hold to check stock at another store.

From this experience, the customer feels they have got maximum value out of the time and money they have invested in the store visit.

Customer is connected via a video link to a product specialist.

Employees can spend more time on the shop floor interacting and engaging with customers.

Employees can also better understand customers' needs, creating the possibility of greater upsell and cross sell.



Connect the front and back office

- Equipping employees with tablets and smartphones means real time information and data can be securely accessed, uploaded and shared from anywhere.
- Stock management processes can be improved as a buyer at an external meeting can check up-to-the-minute inventory levels before placing an order, wherever they are.
- Employees can also update other team members while on the move.
- A dispatcher can coordinate more efficiently with the delivery team, minimising returns from home delivery services.

Create a well informed workforce

Real-time collaboration between employees means information can be shared and accessed much more quickly. Devices can be used to inform staff on the latest special offers or incentives, for example how they are performing against their sales targets for the day. Or they can be used for training purposes. Mobile applications can also be used for staff to clock in and out each day, automating the management of timesheets, or even allowing staff to swap shift allocations between each other while still complying with corporate time management practices. This ultimately results in a happier, more efficient workforce, better informed staff and a higher quality, more efficient service for the customer.

Actionable insight

Not only does improving employee connectivity create a more memorable experience for the customer, their interaction with your staff over connected devices also provides actionable insight. This insight can be used to help measure sales performance, identify customer behaviours and improve profiling. It will also identify further training areas for your staff.

Equipping the digital workforce

It's important to ensure staff are equipped with the right devices, from smartphones to tablets. Devices can be locked down so that employees can only access information relating to their work. In a customer-facing environment, the most advanced retailers are beginning to realise that providing digital devices, or allowing their staff to use their own devices to access customer-facing apps, drives better engagement and efficiency.

Enabling the experience

Any seamless digital experience is underpinned by connectivity. But retail estates are often not built with connectivity in mind. There are a number of options that can be implemented to enable your mobility infrastructure from fixed WAN, cellular WAN, 4G and O₂ Wifi. And you can also enhance coverage within a retail estate, for the benefit of both customers and employees alike.

Why O₂?

By improving connectivity for employees, customers will see the benefits in the form of a prompt, knowledgeable service from well informed and motivated people. Faster resolution times, higher satisfaction scores and a customer experience that is unified across multiple channels will ultimately increase sales.

Connecting your staff is just one of the components of Experiential Retail.

To find out how we can help you, call us on:
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