



Cross-channel conversions

Historically retailers have had separate online and store teams but many are adapting to the cross-channel nature adopted by shoppers

Using the expertise of store staff could be key to boosting a retailer's online conversion rates. But, as **Ben Cooper** discovers, there's work to be done to integrate a cross-channel approach

Despite the many innovations in multichannel retailing, conversion online remains stubbornly low. Bricks-and-mortar retailers can expect to convert at least 10% – and often 25% – of visits into sales. Online the figure is more like 2% to 4%.

It's the new big headache for retailers. With so much investment and innovation in ecommerce technology designed to increase online conversion, and yet with so much more evidently still to do, how can retailers help the shopper through the whole journey and not have them leave empty handed?

Perversely, the answer may lie in the store itself. As time goes on, retailers are increasingly looking to their physical space and the staff

that run their shops, not to compete with the online offer, but to help it. So what is the next big step in conversion? And how can retailers ensure their stores, and their staff, are truly cross-channel?

Don't think in channels

Ecommerce may be a modern phenomenon to many, but there are certain practices that already need to be consigned to the history books. One of these, says Laura Morroll, managing consultant at supply-chain specialist LCP Consulting, is the notion that stores and online retailing should be separated in the minds of staff members.

She explains: "Customers don't really think about channels when they are shopping,



Retailers see the channels a lot more than customers do. Historically retailers have had separate teams for store and online and it makes it very hard to think cross-channel, but they're overcoming that and starting to respond to online and store in the same way."

If retailers want their websites to be places for shopping and not just visiting, they ↘

need to get this right. And with shopping now a 24-hour business, it's the digital channels that are most in need of attention at the moment.

Fara Darvill, head of marketing at ecommerce consultancy Summit, says: "For shoppers, on and offline are one and the same, they are both part of the retail and, importantly, the brand experience. Connecting with and engaging customers who are always 'on' is fast becoming the Holy Grail.

"Digital is ever more important to retailers, so the bricks-and-clicks experience and activity has to be complementary and synergistic."

Getting staff on board

But are stores – and their staff – being overlooked? Morroll says that, while clearly the digital channels are under the spotlight in the quest to increase conversion, traditional sales teams should not be overlooked.

She says: "It's become more important to incentivise in-store staff to think in terms of store sales and online by bringing the website into the store. And if you can change the in-store environment to make it more exciting for staff, and get the technology in store, it makes the job more interesting and multi-dimensional."

In March, when Superdry revealed it had invested heavily in training all of its staff to use iPads, and rolled out two or three of the devices to every one of its 86 stores, ecommerce and marketing director Jon Wragg said the goal was "joining up both online and in store".

To the same end, more retailers are installing free wi-fi in stores and training staff to encourage shoppers to use it. A survey of British shoppers, carried out by logistics firm UPS in March, revealed that 33% of customers compare product prices while in store. Helping them to shop around by providing free wi-fi might seem counterproductive, but, says Morroll, it's become a new part of good in-store sales practice to facilitate this process, and make



Fat Face prioritises visibility

If store staff are going to be trained to maximise conversion, the logistics have to be spot on as well, according to Fat Face sourcing and supply chain director Simon Ratcliffe. "Whichever channel you're in it's about maximising visibility of a single pool of stock. It might be in a distribution centre or in stores; it might be in a distribution centre but allocated for store sales. But it has to be there for the customer to see," he says.

"Then the challenge has to be in producing the easiest process for the customer, in other words whether the process is assisted by a staff member or unassisted, in store or at home, and the staff can help the customer to select."

Getting staff to understand the important role they play in this new structure is vital. Equally, backing up store staff with an efficient cross-channel focused supply chain so that their good advice is matched by the logistics – and they are not blamed for logistical problems out of their hands – is vital too.

Ratcliffe adds: "Either way you have to be able to fulfil the order; that's how you drive conversion and loyalty. That's what we're all moving towards, that alignment."

the most of it. She explains: "Accept the fact that customers want to search for products while they are in your store. You have to help them; you might be able to rescue a sale tactically, for example by price-matching another retailer."

A resourceful staff member who can use the fact that shoppers are researching while in store, and turn it in their favour like this, will impress customers and create loyalty. And with the UPS survey also revealing that a new breed of what the company

terms 'flex shoppers' are demanding to have multiple shopping channels, and delivery options, it's vital all these services are promoted to customers in store.

If retailers are to satisfy this demand for multiple channels and delivery options – and boost conversion rates online in the process – staff need to be fully in the picture,

says Morroll. "Some store teams are just not aware of what they can offer customers," she adds. "By communicating within an organisation you can put your staff member in a position where they can make decisions with confidence."

An expert member of staff can be the difference between a sale and a fail in store, and without that guidance factor a website is often going to lag behind, however slick it is. If, as Morroll puts it, retailers can "recreate the store experience online" and vice versa, big strides can be made.

Training, re-training, and investment in technology are essential, and if staff are going to deliver, everything has to work perfectly behind the scenes. It seems impossible that after so much disruption, so much is still left to do. But the race for online is still on, and the prize is big.

How Sainsbury's took staff on a multichannel journey

When Sainsbury's set about growing its multichannel presence with the help of commerce service provider Salmon, the grocer went through its operations bit by bit. The result was a much-improved service, with more personalised offers, call-centre and in-store support tools, improved navigation and optimised sites for mobiles and tablets.

But one of the most crucial elements of the project, says Salmon commercial director Iain Devine, was to bring store staff along the journey. "Training is key so that store staff will feel

confident in using digital services," he says. "Aligning incentives and sharing sales data is also important so that store staff feel part of a multichannel business and are happy to help customers place orders online, deal with questions or returns. Retailers who fail to train their staff or align incentives will find broken links in their multichannel chain.

"Retailers must have staff and technology aligned and working together, which will create a consistent high level of service and drive sales across multiple channels and promote loyalty,"

"Accept that customers want to search for products while they are in your store"

Laura Morroll,
LCP Consulting