

Winning the omnichannel retail experience

Connecting stores, E-commerce and supply chain
for sustainable growth





Introduction

Retail customers don't think in channels. They don't distinguish between your stores, website, mobile app, marketplace presence, customer service teams, or fulfilment operation. To them, it's one brand, one experience, and one expectation.

Whether they're researching products online, checking store availability, clicking and collecting, arranging home delivery, or returning an item purchased through a different channel, customers expect the experience to feel seamless.

The challenge for retailers is that many organisations still operate behind the scenes as a collection of separate functions and systems. Store teams focus on store performance. Digital teams focus on e-commerce growth. Supply chain teams focus on fulfilment. Customer service teams focus on support.

While each area plays an important role, customers judge the entire experience, not individual departments. As retail continues to evolve, creating a connected omnichannel operation has become a competitive necessity rather than a strategic aspiration.

This guide explores how retailers can connect operations, improve visibility, and deliver a more consistent customer experience across every touchpoint.

Understanding today's retail customer

Customer expectations have changed dramatically over the last decade. Consumers now expect:

Real-time stock information

Flexible fulfilment options

Fast delivery

Hassle-free returns

Consistent pricing

Personalised experiences

Immediate access to information

Most importantly, they expect convenience.

Customers want the flexibility to shop whenever, wherever, and however they choose. A customer might discover a product on social media, research it on a website, purchase it through a mobile device, collect it from a store, and later contact customer services regarding a return. From the customer's perspective, this should feel like a single journey. For many retailers, however, supporting that journey requires significant operational coordination behind the scenes.

Why omnichannel matters

Omnichannel retail is often discussed in terms of customer experience, but its impact extends much further. A connected retail operation can help organisations:

Increase sales opportunities

Improve inventory utilisation

Strengthen customer loyalty

Improve fulfilment efficiency

Enhance operational visibility

Support long-term growth

Retailers that successfully connect channels are often better positioned to respond to changing customer behaviours and market conditions. The goal is not simply to offer multiple channels. It is to ensure those channels work together.

The cost of disconnected channels

Many retailers have expanded their digital capabilities over time. However, growth has often happened quickly, resulting in separate processes, systems, and teams managing different parts of the customer journey. This can create challenges such as:

Inaccurate inventory visibility

Inconsistent customer experiences

Delayed fulfilment

Duplicate processes

Operational inefficiencies

Frustrated customers

A customer may see an item available online only to discover it cannot actually be fulfilled. A returns process may differ depending on where an item was purchased. Store teams may have limited visibility of online activity. These gaps can damage both customer trust and operational performance.

The five foundations of omnichannel success

1. Create a single view of inventory

Inventory visibility sits at the heart of the omnichannel experience. Customers expect accurate information regarding product availability regardless of where they choose to shop. Retailers require visibility into inventory across:

Stores

Distribution centres

Warehouses

Fulfilment hubs

Third-party logistics providers

Without this visibility, organisations often struggle to support fulfilment options such as:

Click and collect

Ship from store

Endless aisle

Same-day delivery

A connected inventory model improves customer confidence while creating greater operational flexibility.

2. Connect customer experiences

Customers expect consistency. They do not want to repeat information when moving between channels or experience different levels of service depending on how they interact with a brand. Successful retailers focus on creating a connected customer experience by ensuring teams have access to relevant customer information throughout the journey. This can help improve:

Service quality

Personalisation

Responsiveness

Customer satisfaction

The more connected the experience feels, the stronger customer loyalty often becomes.

3. Build flexible fulfilment capabilities

Fulfilment has become a key differentiator in modern retail. Customers increasingly expect options that suit their lifestyles and preferences. Examples include:

Click and collect

Home delivery

Next-day delivery

Store fulfilment

Kerbside collection

Meeting these expectations requires operational flexibility and strong coordination across the supply chain. Retailers that can fulfil orders efficiently across multiple channels are often able to improve both customer experience and stock utilisation.

4. Improve operational visibility

Omnichannel success depends on informed decision-making. Retail leaders need visibility across the entire operation, including:

Inventory performance

Order fulfilment

Customer activity

Delivery performance

Returns volumes

Store operations

Access to reliable information enables organisations to identify issues earlier and respond more effectively. Visibility also supports continuous improvement by helping leaders understand where opportunities exist.

5. Align people, processes and technology

Technology plays an important role in enabling omnichannel retail, but technology alone is not enough. Successful retailers align:

Operational processes

Customer journeys

Workforce capabilities

Business objectives

Supporting technologies

The most effective omnichannel strategies combine all of these elements together. When people, processes, and systems operate in alignment, customer experiences become far more consistent.

The importance of click and collect

Click and collect has become a core component of many retail strategies. Customers value the convenience of ordering online while avoiding delivery charges or waiting for parcels to arrive. For retailers, click and collect offers opportunities to:



Increase store footfall

Improve customer convenience

Reduce delivery costs

Improve inventory utilisation

However, successful execution depends on accurate inventory information, efficient store processes, and clear customer communication. A poor click-and-collect experience can quickly undermine customer confidence.

Managing returns more effectively

Returns represent one of the biggest operational challenges in omnichannel retail.

Customers increasingly expect flexibility when returning products. They may purchase through one channel and expect to return through another. Managing returns efficiently helps retailers:

Improve customer satisfaction

Reduce operational costs

Recover inventory faster

Improve stock visibility

Leading retailers view returns as an important part of the customer experience rather than simply an operational process.

Using data to understand customer behaviour

Retailers have access to more customer information than ever before. When used effectively, this information can provide valuable insight into:

Purchasing patterns

Product preferences

Shopping habits

Channel usage

Customer loyalty

These insights can support better decision-making across marketing, merchandising, supply chain, and operations. Understanding how customers engage across channels helps retailers create experiences that are more relevant and more effective.

The role of stores in an omnichannel world

Despite the growth of digital commerce, stores remain a vital part of the retail landscape. However, their role continues to evolve. Stores are increasingly being used as:

Fulfilment locations

Collection points

Service centres

Product experience hubs

As a result, operational models must adapt. Retailers that successfully integrate stores into their omnichannel strategy often benefit from greater flexibility and improved customer convenience.

Common barriers to omnichannel success

Many retailers share similar challenges when developing omnichannel capabilities.

Limited inventory visibility

Without accurate stock information, fulfilment becomes difficult.

Siloed operations

Teams operate independently, reducing coordination and efficiency.

Inconsistent customer experiences

Customers receive different levels of service depending on the channel.

Legacy processes

Older operating models may not support modern customer expectations.

Poor data quality

Inaccurate information can affect customer confidence and operational performance.

Recognising these barriers is the first step towards overcoming them.

What leading retailers do differently

Retailers delivering strong omnichannel experiences often share several common characteristics. They:

Prioritise visibility across operations.
Create connected customer journeys.
Invest in fulfilment flexibility.
Improve inventory accuracy.
Break down organisational silos.
Use data to guide decision-making.

Most importantly, they design their business around how customers shop rather than how the organisation is structured internally.

Looking ahead

Customer expectations are unlikely to slow down. Retail experiences will become increasingly connected, personalised, and technology-enabled. The retailers best positioned for future success will be those capable of:

Adapting quickly
Connecting operations effectively
Responding to customer needs
Delivering consistently across channels

Omnichannel retail is no longer a differentiator for a select few organisations. It is rapidly becoming an expectation.

Final thoughts

Customers expect one brand experience, regardless of channel. Delivering that experience requires more than a digital strategy or an e-commerce platform. It requires connected operations, accurate data, flexible fulfilment, and visibility across the entire value chain. Retailers that continue to operate in silos may find it increasingly difficult to meet customer expectations and maintain profitability.

Those that successfully connect stores, digital commerce, supply chain, and customer service create a stronger foundation for growth, loyalty, and long-term success. The future of retail belongs to organisations that can make every channel feel like part of the same conversation.

About TCT

At TCT, we help retailers create the operational foundations needed to deliver seamless omnichannel experiences. Through SAP transformation support, operational readiness, programme assurance, business change, and process optimisation, we work alongside retail leaders to improve visibility, strengthen performance, and unlock measurable business value.

Looking to create a more connected retail operation? Speak to TCT about how we can help you improve customer experience, increase operational agility, and maximise the value of your transformation investment.

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