

Boost sales with omnichannel retail in 3 simple steps

By [Gareth Hawkey](#)

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It is no secret that local retailers are having a torrid time. The economy remains in the doldrums with investors and consumers spooked by debilitating load shedding, ongoing job cuts and a volatile political environment. Consumers naturally cut back on spending in uncertain times, and retailers are undoubtedly feeling the heat.



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To add to their woes, many shoppers are opting for the convenience of e-commerce – and for traditional brick and mortar stores, this further erodes sales. Notably, a forecast by World Wide Worx shows that online retail sales figures in South Africa are expected to more than double from 2016 to almost R20 billion by 2020.

So, where to from here for SA's embattled retailers?

Arguably, the future belongs to retailers and brands that have the courage to invest in 'the customer of the future'. What does this customer want? A seamless and secure shopping experience – that can start anywhere (the lounge, the gym, in bed), and end with delivery to his/her door. Increasingly, this means that retailers have to explore the concept of omnichannel.

In the retail context, omnichannel refers to a multichannel approach to sales that aims to provide customers with a seamless and fully integrated shopping experience – whether they're shopping online from a desktop or mobile or spending the morning at the mall. Omnichannel enables customers to bounce between mobile-browsing and in-store experiences, essentially uniting what were previously disparate parts into one brand journey.

This approach enables savvy retailers to use different 'faces' and different platforms to market the same products, to the same customers. It increases the customer touchpoints, and allows retailers to harness the very best of digital to create an unparalleled customer experience. Without a doubt, even if retailers take only small steps toward the integrated, omnichannel offering, it is a future-proof strategy and a surefire way to boost sales in the middle to long term.



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Here are three simple steps to getting started on the omnichannel journey...

1. Appoint a customer experience champion

As with any new approach, successfully embracing the omnichannel requires executive/leadership buy-in – without this, the strategy is doomed. To drive digital adoption throughout the business, retailers should, therefore, recruit and appoint a customer experience champion. This individual will have a future-focused mindset: he/she understands what the customer of the future looks like, and can instill a culture of innovation and agility.

2. Create an app or mobile offering

Moving towards the fully integrated omnichannel model does not happen overnight, particularly when resources are scarce. However, retailers can begin the journey by creating an enticing app or mobile offering that enables customers to engage with the brand in a different way. For example, by providing an app that allows your customers to research and look up stock, this can already drive engagement.

Find ways to incentivize your customers to engage with the app, for example, with discounted offerings. Later, the app can be expanded to enable click and collect, click and deliver, etc. The key is to start with some kind of engaging mobile experience, and build from there!



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3. Empower your sales teams

One of the understated benefits of harnessing omnichannel is that it can provide your sales teams with more information to better serve their customers. This is key, as studies have found that knowledgeable sales people dramatically boost sales (by up to 40%!) in comparison to those who are 'disconnected' from the products they are selling.

By leveraging the omnichannel model, retailers can provide sales teams with data such as customer purchase history that in turn, enables them to find out exactly what the customer is likely to want. This is a great way to build brand loyalty and have returning customers.

In an environment in which loyalty is hard to win – and even harder to retain – retailers have to be thinking about the

customer of the future. By beginning the omnichannel journey, with small steps, retailers can future proof the business while immediately boosting sales.

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