

For next-gen digital retail, think security first

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South African retailers have long lagged their counterparts in the U.S. and Europe in terms of embracing new digital channels to improve business operations and marketing. However, they are now moving to catch up amid an increasingly competitive environment and demands from tech-savvy consumers.



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Analysts predict an omni-channel future for retailers: an environment in which e-commerce, mobile and IoT devices collaborate seamlessly to measure and analyse customer traffic, support customer engagement and personalised communications and targeted offerings. [Recent research](#) by Morar Consulting in the U.S. has found that shoppers increasingly expect a seamless, digitally-enhanced retail experience, with growing numbers seeking integrated virtual and bricks and mortar shopping such as loyalty programme information automatically tied to their credit cards, and mobile payments becoming the norm.

In South Africa, most retailers are just beginning the digital journey, but they are keenly aware that if they are to stay competitive they will need to start with sophisticated wireless networks enabling them to understand and analyse customer behaviour, engage with the customer, enhance the customer experience and drive in-store sales.

By connecting a Wi-Fi network with loyalty programmes and analytics, for example, the retailer would be in a position to identify individual customers, track their recent online search queries and present them with special offers on the exact items they were researching as soon as they are in the vicinity of the store. When surveillance, point-of-sale technologies and RFID scanners are integrated into the overall digital ecosystem, retailers are positioned to better support sales with more effective human resource and stock management; while optimising efficiencies and controlling costs at the same time.

Increased security risks

The potential for digital retail is huge, but at the same time, this new multi-channel/omni-channel digital environment increases the risks for retailers and customers alike. Mobile platforms are the latest target for malware and other security threats, yet to meet expectations of a digitally-enabled environment, retailers need to let unknown devices onto their networks. In an unsecured digital environment, retailers risk hacking attacks and malware impacting their systems; while customers are at risk of identity theft and fraud. The retailer also faces the risk of reputational damage and loss of digital trust in the event of a breach that puts customer information in the wrong hands.



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To harness the potential of next-generation digital retail, retailers have to think security first. They need to be strategic about their digital implementations, starting with risk assessments before they move to embrace the latest digital retail technologies. With Wi-Fi at the heart of this new digital environment, retailers must ensure that their WLAN solution is absolutely secure and serves to protect against everything from wireless protocol and RF attacks to malware and viruses. In addition, the entire digital environment must be capable of being integrated and managed seamlessly, supporting all forms of security – from endpoint security to compliant payments data traffic.

Retailers have to ensure that they are equipped with integrated security solutions that combat the latest threat vectors and zero-day attacks, as well as being future-proof and capable of integrating fast-emerging new technologies such as facial recognition, biometric scanning, and IoT sensors.

As these technologies are introduced into the retail network, the Wi-Fi security solution must offer the feature flexibility, performance, and application control to handle a broad mix of traffic including biometrics, video, voice services, payment transactions, and advertising, while simultaneously serving patrons and harvesting consumer analytics from store visitors.

Without the right levels of security in place, however, retailers risk missing a multitude of digital opportunities.

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