

Shoppers and retailers agree: all we want for Christmas is Omnichannel visibility



Black Friday is still a novice on European soil, making the trip over the pond in recent years and plaguing Brits like the pox ever since. As the American phenomenon plans again to kick off the holiday shopping season, retailers are gearing up to meet the biggest of consumer demands: omnichannel.

Give customers the gift of reliable flexibility

For shoppers, interconnected channels offer convenient flexibility in how they find and obtain the perfect gift, and with holiday deadlines fast approaching, fewer consumers are willing to risk disappointment. The Holiday Outlook Report 2015 from CFI Group found that product availability matters most to shoppers. 79% of online holiday shoppers are "likely to switch brands if items are out of stock," making it critical that more products are available "both in-store and online."

On a major shopping day like Black Friday, omnichannel visibility across channels, enabled by converged retail management platforms like Retail Pro, can make all the difference. Oftentimes, retailers do indeed have the items in stock – but in another location. With inventory visibility across channels, they can draw from existing stock to complete the sale.

In addition, exposing inventory information to customers online will help shoppers chart their holiday strategy. Target, a general merchandise retailer in the US and India, uses geolocation data to detect the nearest store and displays both the quantity available and estimated fulfillment time for in-store pickup. If it's unavailable at the nearest location, shoppers can see where else it's in stock. Customers get a

complete view into inventory, so there are no surprises and no disappointments.

Retailers get a holistic view of their customers

While shoppers and retailers both have the same end goal – getting the right gift in time – the journey will be largely impacted by the omnichannel experience this Christmas.

As far as shoppers are concerned, "selling channels have converged," said the latest omnichannel report from RSR, and with this firm expectation, shoppers are looking to retailers to streamline the experience. Retailers with platform technology are recognising, however, that with data converging in their retail software, "most roads lead to the store," whether directly or behind the scenes.

Online shoppers head to the store

For online pre-shoppers, Click-and-Collectors, and those returning online purchases in-stores, retailers can gather behavioral data and access it on mobile devices from the sales floor on a converged platform like Retail Pro. Store associates can use that data to personalize gift recommendations or offer loyalty discounts to high-volume shoppers.

With Click-and-Collect accounting for 56% of online orders at John Lewis last Christmas, opportunities for online-initiated in-store engagement look promising, and not just for the holidays. Customer data gathered during the winter influx can be used to hone in on smarter, personalized marketing for the new year.

Bringing the store to the customer

For online orders, omnichannel retailers can flexibly fulfill from the nearest store to the customer's home, or from a different location to a store near the customer – instead of incurring greater costs to fulfill from ecommerce inventory in a far-off warehouse. For the nearly 400-store UK retailer, Pets at Home, the Deliver-to-Store service is a "key contributor to omnichannel revenues," especially during the holidays.

With omnichannel visibility, customers get every gift they need and retailers get a more effective way to use available resources across every channel.

**By Alexandra Frith | Retail Pro International
Director of Marketing**