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- Keeping up with retail technology

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Print solutions for modern retail



The ability to flexibly print advertising, labelling and other documentation is still crucial to stores in 2018.

The evolution in mobile printer functionality gives users the flexibility to print materials on demand, where and when they need them. Wireless mobility can take advantage of point of sale (PoS) printing to improve worker productivity, labelling accuracy and responsiveness to customer needs.

From traditional barcodes to advanced radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, the mobile printing sector is keeping up with the pace of change across the UK High Street – but are retailers prepared to invest?



Keeping up with retail technology

Consumer expectations are changing faster than the retail industry is able to reinvent itself – so what can merchants do to catch up?

giving retailers the ability to print receipts anywhere on the shop floor in front of the customer.

“This functionality can significantly impact the cost and efficiency savings for retailers, with the ability to print mobile receipts being directly used to tackle queue-busting in-store,” added Brennan.

At a time of heightened competition, the retail sector is faced with having to improve its operations and reduce costs in order to thrive - and not just survive - in the digital world.

New technology options

New technologies, such as mobile hardware and cloud-based software empower staff by ensuring they have access to all the necessary data management, analytics, data visualisation and real-time decision capabilities at their fingertips in one accessible and unified platform.

For instance, research from Planet Retail RNG found that retailers spent \$104 billion on manually changing price labels in 2017. The survey of 5,000 consumers and 1,000 retailers showed that 84 per cent of retailers agreed that the ability to price with speed can help improve margins and store efficiencies.

Meanwhile, a survey of 1,000 UK consumers carried out by SOTI revealed that 69 per cent said technologies such as digital signage and self-checkouts would make them more likely to return. However, only around half of UK retailers have a digital strategy in place.

Companies that succeed in this space will be those that manage to reap the benefits of data and use it to drive insights deriving greater efficiencies and accuracies throughout the entire process, from the supply chain to the shop floor.

Consumer expectations are changing faster than the retail industry is able to reinvent itself – so what can merchants do to catch up?

Investing in new technology would seem like the obvious answer, but with so many competing software and hardware providers, it's difficult to know where to start.

“In an era of omnichannel shopping where a retailer's bricks and mortar presence is just as crucial as its e-commerce operations, utilising new technologies to boost in-store efficiency is high on the agenda for many retailers,” commented Simon Brennan, end user client manager for mobile at Brother UK.

He explained that using mobile printing solutions in conjunction with technologies such as Bluetooth and wireless means things like printing can now be done easily on the move,

Connecting back office and shop floor

Diana Parker, sector lead for retail, consumer goods, travel and transport at Microsoft UK, explained that delivering the right experience or product to the right customer at the right time can only be achieved if all operations are streamlined in the back office to support shop floor and online engagement.

"For this to take place, technology behind-the-scenes must be optimised to support the front of house experience. Having new shiny visual displays on the shop floor becomes meaningless if, in the background, employees are left with insufficient data on how the business is performing day-to-day and find themselves struggling with complex business processes," she said.

"Customers' needs are constantly changing, but in the end, they seek a personalised, speedy and seamless experience – that doesn't change. Brands therefore must make sure their employees have the suitable data insights derived from intelligent, trusted and secure technology in the background," pointed out Parker.

A recent report from PCMS polled 2,000 UK consumers, showing that 60 per cent use their own smartphone, tablet or the store's device while shopping - rising to as many as 80 per cent of under 45s - while a further 15 per cent chose to use digital signage, digital kiosks or interactive screens.

A YouGov survey backed up this trend, finding that among the 'Generation Z' demographic of 18-24 year olds, self-service checkouts, contactless payment and stock checking tools are the most desirable in-store technologies.

Brother solutions

With Brother's managed print service, you only pay for what you print, with no minimum spend. Matthew Jones, head of end user sales at Brother, said that because retailers are told what they're currently printing, they can then accurately forecast over the next three to five years how much they're going to spend on print.

"This is key, because it's measurable, it gives you control, and you can hold each location accountable quite easily using the managed software," he added.

In addition to cost savings, security is a crucial factor in any technology solution. Brother's SecurePro system features advanced features such as pull-printing, where users can either use a swipe card when they get to the device, or they can send documents with their own preferential PIN, so things are not printed out until they actually get to a machine and enter that PIN.

Dedicating just a small amount of time and money to making sure your business isn't just doing things 'because that's the way we've always done it' could pay dividends. While being risk averse is perfectly natural, it's easy to get left behind if rivals are willing to innovate and be first movers in your market.

At a time of heightened competition, the retail sector is faced with having to improve its operations and reduce costs in order to thrive - and not just survive - in the digital world.





Q&A

Ged Cairns, Head of CIV and Mobile Business Unit

How do you see the retail technology market in 2018 – what are the key trends?

From Brother's perspective, we have seen a rise in demand from retailers trying to accelerate the time to action their labelling applications. This includes price changing, shelf edge labelling, and specifically in the food/deli type retailers, a demand for in-store food safety labelling, as manual labelling is seen as time consuming and prone to errors. The rise in BOPIS (buy online, pick up in store) is also driving a new demand for mobile labelling, as products are picked from the store stock, labelled, quarantined and made ready for a customer pick up.

Retailers are going through challenging times at the moment, how is Brother helping them in-store?

Our approach is to listen to customer views, establish a requirement and deliver a total solution. This is why Brother is embarking on a mission of integrating its printers into retail software solutions and associated hardware manufacturers to make a joined-up solution that is fit for purpose and adds true value. We are doing the integration work and providing commercial propositions that demonstrate our 'better together' mentality. Consequently, this eases the burden on IT departments by providing comfort that different vendors are working together to provide a combined value to the decision makers.

It's hard to prioritise tech spending, given all the new innovations, so why is mobile printing so important?

One of the key measures of today's retail economy is price competitiveness. Retailers are constantly monitoring their prices against the market and adjusting accordingly. For some this involves printing off multiple sheets of price labels on the back-office printer and hopefully applying them to the right product. Or worse, waiting for head office to send out the new price labels and applying by hand at some point in time. Now imagine receiving an instruction to reprice some products and being able to do that via your handheld terminal and mobile printer within a few minutes at the point of sale. Of course, mobile PoS is another rising trend, especially in busy transaction stores. By carrying a mobile printer, you can issue the sales transaction receipt as well as the credit card receipt – job done.

Our experience online must be mirrored with our engagement at store level, so the quality and ease of product selection, choice and transaction should feel easy and straightforward.

What practical advantages does upgrading a store's back office systems actually have?

It's all about keeping up to date with the consumer demand for choice, service and price competitiveness. The staff you hire and the training you give them can have a massive impact on service levels and customer perception of your store and the whole shopping experience. Support this with technology at the hands of the retail staff and you're on your way to increasing loyalty and brand preference. Checking stock availability, delivery timescales, multiple payment options, loyalty rewards and offers makes the customer feel that you have thought of everything. It's about starting to think like a consumer and not as a profit centre. With technology and old fashioned customer service working hand in hand, this can make a positive difference.

What do you feel the future of shopping will look like?

The shoppers' expectation of their retail experience has risen dramatically over the last five years and this is not slowing down. We still love shopping in stores of any size: boutique, department store or High Street. But we also love shopping from the comfort of our home, office, tube, bus, etc. Our experience online must be mirrored with our engagement at store level, so the quality and ease of product selection, choice and transaction should feel easy and straightforward. Take a look at how you shop and what you expect from that process: choice, size, colour, price, availability, delivery options, etc – the answer is probably staring you in the face.

**NEED A
MOBILE PRINT
SOLUTION THAT
INTEGRATES WITH YOUR
BUSINESS?**

LET'S TALK SHOP

Smart technology solutions can make a big difference to operational efficiency and customer service.

From the shop floor to the warehouse, Brother's mobile printing solutions deliver quickly and efficiently, on the spot.

Brother's broad range is built to withstand the constant use and demands of busy retail environments and integrate seamlessly with practically any device or operating system.



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