

Leveraging digital technology for a seamless, 360-degree customer journey

By [Lindy Lee](#)

29 Sep 2017

Retail, like most industries, is undergoing a transformation. The shopping experience is no longer a linear one, where a person simply enters a store, makes a purchase and leaves, never to return (unless there is, of course, a complaint). It is cyclic. With multiple digital touchpoints, retailers can offer customers a 360-degree journey which, ultimately, ensures that once they embark on a journey with them, they return - time and time again.



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Retailers face the challenge of catering to an increasingly demanding market. With so much choice available to customers, retailers need to have “something special” to retain customer interest and stay ahead of their competition. Digitising the customer journey enables retailers to not only cater to these demands, but also to really get to know their customer so that they can continue to do so.

Digitising retail

Technology is everywhere. It is wholly entrenched into the way we live, work and play, and has completely changed how we expect products and services delivered to us. Products can be bought online, or instore, and delivered to your home within hours via artificially intelligent (AI) drones, all without your ever having to come into contact with another human being if that's what you prefer.

Payments, too, have evolved, with multiple options available to pay regardless of whether you do your shopping online or instore.

However, the technology is not what is important. What is important is how it is used to enhance the customers' experience and provide them with a journey that keeps them coming back.

The 360-degree journey

There are five stages of the customer journey which – the goal is – ends right back at the beginning. Within each stage,

retailers can leverage digital technology to enliven their customers' experience and provide a seamless progression to the next stage.

- **Awareness**

The customer journey begins with awareness. Possibly one of the biggest challenges that retailers face, after retaining existing customers, is attracting them and making them aware of their brand, product and service in the first place.

Promotions are not a new concept, however the way that retailers promote their products and brands has evolved. Retailers can target their market directly through the likes of applications and location-based services, tapping into the insights that back-end data analytics provides.

For example, a retailer may issue a new promotion and send information through to a person's smartphone, via an application or targeted advertising on social media. The retailer could also use proximity marketing to send messages to a potential customer's smart device, making them aware of the nearby promotion. Both of these campaigns can be directed specifically at those people who are more likely to become customers, based on data which advises of shopping habits and other criteria.

- **Choice**

Whether customers opt to shop instore, or online, they are looking for more information on the products or services that interest them. Retailers can leverage multiple interactive digital platforms such as digital signage instore or online shopping platforms to supply customers with all the relevant information around a specific promotion or product.

Enticements such as specials aimed specifically at customers of a certain gender or age group, or within a certain area, help to make customers feel special. Few things frustrate a customer more than wanting to buy something but having limited information on the product, or how to buy. Retailers that ensure that their customers have this information at their fingertips, will make the choice and buying process much simpler, encouraging customers to continue shopping with their brand.

- **Transaction**

Having made an informed decision about the products and service available to them, customers are ready to buy. Online purchasing typically offers simple payment options, however retailers need to extend this simplicity to instore. People have little patience for queues, and retailers are exploring ways to reduce waiting time without having to increase payment terminals. Easy payment options such as self-checkout points, queue-busting, quick terminals and mobile payments on the floor are available to answer this need.

- **Delivery**

Most instore customers simply take their purchases with them when they leave, however delivery is required for larger items as well as online purchases. Other than being as fast as possible, delivery needs to be accurate, and customers need to be

kept informed of the progress.

The Internet of Things offers many solutions to ensure that goods are properly tracked and managed en-route to customers, while providing real-time visibility to customers, accompanied by regular automated updates. Customers need to know where their parcel is and when it is expected to arrive, while being kept in the loop on any potential delays.

- **After sales**

The way in which after sales services are provided determine whether a customer returns to your store, completing the 360-degree journey, or whether they opt to do business elsewhere in future.

Application-based loyalty programmes, regular and – more importantly – targeted updates on new products and services, and aftersales support are all key components that keep customers coming back for more.

Retail is no longer just about making sales. To remain competitive, retailers need to evolve alongside their customers. They need to embrace an agile, digital economy that allows them to offer customers unique experiences and which enables that cyclic, 360-degree journey.

T-Systems will be showcasing its retail solutions at their upcoming 'InTouch Technology 2017' event, to be held on 3 October 2017 in Johannesburg and on 16 October 2017 in Cape Town.

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