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5 Reasons Retailers Need Truly Unified Communications

Improve Productivity and Enhance
Customer Service While Saving Money



The key to retail growth is to get shoppers to not only buy and love your products, but also provide a compelling experience in store, on line, and at every touch point to ensure long-term loyalty. Yet, with as many as 77% of shoppers spending less time in stores interacting with your brand, retailers are turning to technology that can bring customer experience back to the forefront — regardless of the location.

Customer service is so important to consumers that they're literally willing to pay for it: as many as 86% said they would pay more for products if they received a better customer experience, according to a [Walker](#) study. Omnichannel or seamless multi-channel communication has been proven to provide a better customer experience and has a direct impact on customer retention. The fact is companies with strong omnichannel customer engagement strategies achieve 89% retention versus 33% for those with weak strategies, as reported by the [Aberdeen Group](#).

Fortunately, consistent, seamless omnichannel communication tools have only gotten better over the years as technology companies tackle the competitive market of unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) and Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS), to harness the power of cloud technology that has made legacy phone and call centre systems obsolete. For retailers, the integration of these UCaaS and CCaaS solutions into a single, truly unified communications platform delivers integrated internal, external, collaboration, and analytics solutions all in one.

The benefits of implementing an integrated communications solution include:

- ✓ A better customer experience;
- ✓ Improved call quality;
- ✓ Smarter use of employee resources;
- ✓ Reduced costs;
- ✓ Increased reliability; and
- ✓ More flexibility and scalability.

This white paper will highlight the five ways a truly unified communications strategy benefits retail organisations across functions and aligns with the most critical goals.

A photograph of three call center employees wearing headsets, looking towards the right. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

1 Enable Associates and Call Centre Employees to Focus on Improving the Customer Experience

The integration of unified communications in store and contact centre solutions into a seamless, cloud-based platform helps improve business efficiencies while freeing up retail associates serve customers more effectively.

One of the most significant benefits of this truly unified communications strategy is the built-in connection between call centre and brick-and-mortar storefront. Customers who call a local store can be automatically and seamlessly routed to a call centre agent for answers to routine questions about inventory, product features, and store policies.

With intelligent routing, calls are routed to agents that have expertise in the specific area related to the customer concern and those agents are supplied with personalised details automatically, allowing them to resolve customer issues more quickly and save time per call. System analytics track the speed and performance of each agent, pinpointing any issues in real-time so retailers can provide retraining or reinforce best practices as needed.

For example, **Town Fair Tire**, a New England, US tyre dealer is now able to keep track of the different types of service and repair events more effectively across 95 locations, with the help of the 8x8 Virtual Contact Centre. “We now can see how many calls come in by agent, how many are for repairing flats versus new tyres, or for tyre rotations, etc.,” according to Mike Barbaro, Senior Vice President. “This lets us know exactly what’s happening in the field, so we can stay close to the needs of our clients, tailor programs to drive sales, and maintain our market leadership in the Northeast.”

Being able to route these types of calls directly to experts in the call centre allows local employees to better serve in-store customers by spending more one-on-one time with them. This personal attention boosts dwell time, which has a positive impact on sales. In fact, research by [Path Intelligence](#) revealed that for every 1% increase in time customers spend shopping, they purchase 1.3% more. When store associates can spend less time taking phone calls, they are available to spend more one-on-one time with shoppers. With a seamless strategy in place, call centre interactions can also be assessed and connected seamlessly to the local store if needed.



2 Free IT Personnel to Prioritise Higher-Level Business Initiatives

The days of having to address communications systems issues associated with legacy, on-premises phone systems are over. A truly unified communications platform can be integrated with other software without IT team assistance, freeing the IT staff to focus on other, higher value priorities. And since it is much simpler to modify, IT personnel no longer have to invest hours in customising and adding new functionality for each individual retail location. IT personnel also are no longer responsible for routine software and security updates — the cloud provider manages them as part of the service.

For example, consumer electronics retailer **BuyDig.com** rolled out its cloud communications system with ease: “We used to have to configure the phones for our on-premise system and it was very time-consuming...During the 8x8 system rollout, we did not have time to configure our new phones one-by-one and it turned out we didn’t need to...They were all ready to activate, with zero configuration required, saving us a huge amount of time.”

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-IT Manager, BuyDig.com



3 Quickly Realise Bottom-Line Cost Savings

While the most obvious and impactful benefit of truly unified communications is improved customer service, retailers also are reporting reduced operational costs. Without an initial investment or lease cost typical of traditional phone systems, a smarter communications solution can pay for itself quickly. Thanks to cloud-based telephony, which eliminates toll and long-distance charges, many businesses see monthly phone charges reduced by 30% to 40%.

Lazy Dog Restaurant and Bar saw its monthly phone charges drop by as much as 40% shortly after implementing 8x8 cloud communications across its network of stores, reported Anthony Mejia, Vice President of Information Technology. Equally important to the chain's national expansion is improved predictability of billing. "8x8 took a highly variable monthly cost and made it consistent within 10%," which helps Lazy Dog plan its continued growth, said Mejia.

But telephony is only one piece of the communications pie. Other standalone business applications retailers typically pay for include conferencing, video and storage. When integrated as part of a unified communications platform, however, the total cost of those individual applications drops considerably.

Given the continued trend toward a decentralised or remote workforce, unified system benefits multiply. Flexible and scalable, a truly unified communications platform can keep pace with a shifting workforce without the need for costly infrastructure expenses.



4 Fuel Business Growth

Retailers with plans to expand geographically or through acquisition can easily modify their truly unified communications platform to accommodate more locations. Unlike on-premise systems that operate independently and are limited by hardware capacity, new phones and locations can be added seamlessly and quickly.

UFC GYM's locations in California, Hawaii, and New York used to have their own independent phone systems. With each new gym addition, IT director Greg Goodman would spend days or weeks setting up the new site and configuring the new system. New set-ups took the bulk of his time, preventing him from focusing on IT expansion strategies. But when UFC Gyms decided to unify all of its locations on the 8x8 platform, this had a significant impact on IT and the ability to turn up new locations quickly. "We can literally have a new location up-and-running within the hour," Goodman noted.

Rapid expansion has also gone from a pipe dream to the realm of the possible. One national consumer electronics retailer deployed more than 90 stores in one day, rapidly implementing a new 8x8 system across thousands of stores in weeks instead of months or even years. And, with even more stores opening globally, the retailer future-proofed their decision by selecting a solution with the capability to scale quickly and cost effectively.

In addition to adding capacity on demand, retailers use unified communications to access business insights through platform analytics in real-time, helping them make better decisions. By understanding customer and employee behavior, based on interaction activity, retailers can streamline the customer journey and streamline internal process, improving the customer experience while gaining efficiency and fueling business growth.

But cloud communications doesn't just support existing growth, it also generates new organic growth. Improved employee efficiency and effectiveness forges new customer relationships, builds on existing ones to increase customer lifetime value, and reduces labour costs to improve profits.

Tapping into the interactions across all your channels within an integrated communications platform provides a wealth of useful data versus attempting to collect, correlate, and analyse data from thousands of independent systems.



5 Expand Capabilities for Improved Internal Communications

By bringing multiple communications technologies on to one platform, the time and effort of managing multiple vendors is no longer needed. Issues with vendor finger pointing, troubleshooting complex problems, and lengthy time to resolution goes away. Efficiency rises while costs drop.

Thanks to a truly unified communications platform, mobile technologies can be easily integrated into stores, the field, and at headquarters. **Foot Levelers**, a US, Virginia-based a manufacturer of custom orthotics, was facing a hefty six-figure investment to replace its nearly obsolete phone system. However, Mike Chittum, director of information security at Foot Levelers, decided to look into a cloud communications solution.

The result? “We avoided spending \$100,000 on a new phone system — our up-front cost was minimal — and overall savings have been at least \$1,500 a month,” explained Chittum. “We’re able to offer the entire company — including our remote workers and manufacturing staff — the ability to reach each other however and wherever they want to be reached. Staff in Virginia, Canada, and Australia can now be instantly connected.”

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-Director of Information Security,
Foot Levelers



And with the ability to analyze aggregate data from all sources, retailers have richer, more robust data to rely on for business decision-making.

That type of information is essential for **Town Fair Tire** to prepare for seasonal sales and service surges. During the first few weeks of autumn, for example, customers tend to purchase snow tyres and have them installed. Likewise, in the spring, they switch back to regular tyres. Previously, this sudden uptick in appointments caused scheduling delays that disappointed customers, leading them to do business elsewhere.

Thanks to the implementation of truly unified communications, Town Fair customers are now able to quickly schedule appointments. Armed with data from its communications, the retailer was able to ramp up its staffing in anticipation of the seasonal spike, leading to happier customers and greater revenue. That is the power of unified data.

With the goal of an improved customer experience, forward-thinking retailers are increasingly turning to unified communications as the solution. Not only does it enhance the customer experience and, consequently, increase customer lifetime value, but the flexibility of the Cloud makes it easier to enact changes across all of your locations instantly, reducing reliance on IT personnel and helping you react faster to everything from new product releases to regional business outages. The resilience and adaptability of the cloud provides an always-on solution, making sure your customers can always reach you, no matter what.

Truly unified communications simplifies usage, cuts costs, and improves efficiency. There is no hardware to contend with, no ongoing maintenance, no updates, and no need for on-site IT support staff. But there are built-in analytics capabilities that inform higher-level decision-making — critical to those looking to optimise their business in the changing retail landscape.

8 Questions To Ask When Evaluating Truly Unified Communications Systems

Before implementing cloud-based communications, be sure it will solve more problems than it creates for your retail operation. Ask the following questions to assess the fit:

- YES NO Will this solution alleviate the challenges we have with our current communications system?
- YES NO Does the solution truly improve our customer experience, or just replace existing telephony?
- YES NO Can the solution provide greater insight into our business — not only in the contact centre, but throughout all locations?
- YES NO Is the solution flexible and adaptable, not only to meet the needs of our retail business today, but also over the next 36 months and beyond?
- YES NO Can this solution be implemented at the scale we need, across our entire retail footprint?
- YES NO Is the solution reliable without the need for expensive MPLS or other networking technologies?
- YES NO Does the vendor have a proven track record of meeting their reliability promises and provide a quality and reliability service level agreement?
- YES NO Can the company provide third-party validated evidence of call quality, security, and data privacy standards as well as our regulatory and compliance requirements?

The optimal solution should cover all of these criteria.



Conclusion

It has become clear that the customer experience is now a retail differentiator and source of competitive advantage. Companies that are investing in technology that supports improved customer service will win new business and solidify relationships with existing customers.

By implementing unified communications capabilities, retail employees have the tools necessary to provide outstanding customer service and communicate with each other, IT can focus on longer-term strategy, the company can more easily expand and grow, and profits can improve as communications costs decline. Truly unified communications is the future of retail.

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