

The Evolving Customer:
Connecting today's shoppers
with store associates

 **Salesfloor**



Overview

This study was conducted to help retailers understand:

- How today's customers want to communicate with sales associates
- What information store associates communicate to customers effectively
- Where retailers are missing opportunities to create connections with customers

In this paper, key findings from the study will uncover how retailers can unify in-store and online shopping experiences to drive sales and customer loyalty in an omnichannel world.

Important statistics to consider:

Today's modern shopper expects personalized, one-to-one shopping experiences wherever and whenever they shop, whether it's in-store or online. However, most retailers have not provided the tools sales associates need to meet these expectations. In the following study, find out **why retailers are missing out on sales** when they don't leverage associates to the best of their abilities, especially when it comes to communicating with customers outside of the physical store.

In stores, associates are at the heart of the shopping experience because they provide a unique service experience.



Online shoppers want to engage with store associates across platforms at anytime.

84% of respondents indicate that email and text messages are their preferred methods of communication with associates outside of stores.



And communication should be more than just transactional in nature, because sales associates are more than just clerks. They are brand ambassadors and product experts with an opportunity to leverage relationships with their local and social communities.

According to shoppers, the two tasks associates excel at are **recommending items** and **looking up inventory across locations**, but associates are not delivering on letting shoppers know about new arrivals and sales. With the **introduction of new technology, retailers can empower sales associates** to serve and sell to customers everywhere, meeting the needs of today's omnichannel shoppers.

Are your associates connected?

Shoppers today want it all – when and where it’s convenient for them. At the heart of this want is knowledgeable sales associates to help them both in-store and online. [Earlier research shows](#) that store associates play an important role when shopping in-store, but shoppers are not receiving the same personalized service online.

The relationship between shoppers and store associates are evolving rapidly. Traditionally, shoppers turned to associates for more of a transactional and “clerk” like role. They would rely on associates to scan a barcode, process payments and open a fitting room. What’s different today, is that shoppers don’t need associates for those particular roles as there is technology that enables the seamless experience in store. Today, shoppers need associates for their expertise throughout their omnichannel journey. If the associate is there in store but not online their journey becomes disjointed and broken. Shoppers want to build a relationship with their store associate and connect with them throughout their shopping journey, whether that journey starts and ends in-store or continues online a week later.

Shoppers should be able to reach out to associates using their preferred method of communication, whether it’s text, email or social media, to receive real-time, live chat assistance and answers from associates, anytime, anywhere.



How do shoppers prefer to message store associates?

(Ranked in order of preference)

1. Email
2. SMS text messaging
3. Live chat
4. Facebook Messenger
5. What’sApp
6. WeChat

New sales associate technology exists for associates to make themselves available to communicate with shoppers while they’re shopping online. For example, retailers can equip associates with mobile apps that provide clienteling, live chat or text message capabilities with shoppers. This not only provides an opportunity to upsell, but also helps shoppers make a decision they will be happy with. With this technology, store associates provide an additional level of service to the customer experience and can easily follow up with shoppers after they leave the physical store.

What did we learn?

Do interactions with store associates influence shoppers purchasing decisions?

Shoppers are **2x more likely** to make a purchase after interacting with a store associate. Imagine the number of online sales that are lost because of missed touch points!





Are your associates ready to market directly to shoppers?

Because customer expectations will continue to increase, the way retailers have traditionally marketed to customers through their national newsletter programs is no longer enough. Customers are expecting the personalized experience from the root at the heart of the shopping experience, which is the local store and associate.

Being at the heart of the shopping journey, associates need to become brand ambassadors and be equipped to market directly to shoppers via email, text message and social platforms. They should recommend products through branded, clickable product links, send exclusive invites to store events and inform shoppers of promotions and new arrivals.

With the right technology in the hands of sales associates, customers can receive the communication that they need anytime and in the medium that they want (email, text, social platforms). Content should also be clickable and browsable within their own device. **When a purchase is made, the associate or store should be credited just as they would have if serving the customer in store.** Up until recently, associates have been handicapped when serving the customer outside of the store without the right technology.

What did we learn?

2 out of 3 shoppers

prefer to be contacted by their local store associate instead of the retailer's national newsletter.



What do shoppers want to be contacted about from their local store associate?

- NEW ARRIVALS
- SALES
- RESTOCKED MERCHANDISE

How are today's stores and retail operations affected?

As today's stores are no longer confined to solely a brick and mortar presence, stores and store operations need to evolve to support the omnichannel shopping journey. Associate tools and training material should be assessed and re-evaluated to create the desired customer journey and shopping experience online and in-store.

Are you equipping your associates with the right tools?

To best serve shoppers, associates should be equipped with mobile devices and tablets that have the appropriate apps and proper security measures and features in place, including tracking all conversations and controlling messages.

Tracking associate-client conversations and interactions, especially, presents a great opportunity for retailers to properly attribute all conversations and sales to associates and stores throughout the shopping journey. Crediting an online sale to an interaction with a store associate will motivate associates and store managers to engage more actively and frequently with shoppers.

In addition to the proper technology, retailers need to ensure that they have the proper wifi and networks in place. Associates will need a reliable connection to the internet and without it may become frustrated and less motivated to use the new technology.

With new technology in place, clienteling can be taken to the next level. Customers can book in-store appointments, communicate with shoppers and get access to omnichannel purchase history. Automated tasks can be set up based on purchase history that advise associates about when and what content to reach out to clients about. With the complete shopper profile at their fingertips, associates are better equipped to make personalized recommendations, while serving a customer both in-store and online.

What did we learn?

Do shoppers want associates to communicate with them across various platforms?

84% of shoppers said that their preferred method of communication with retail store associates is email or text message.

How do shoppers prefer to receive a message from store associates?



1. Email
2. SMS text message
3. Facebook Messenger
4. Live chat
5. WhatsApp
6. WeChat
7. Phone
8. Other

Are your associates using technology to create personalized customer experiences?

As many retailers adopt new technology to give consumers the shopping experience they desire online and in-store, store associates are often left without proper training.

While store associates are well versed at using technology to find inventory, they need to be properly trained on how to use technology to create personalized experiences for shoppers in their day-to-day job. Similarly, sales associates who are trained to serve customers right away in store should now be trained to also quickly provide this level of service through digital channels. They should be trained on how to engage customers across platforms, include branded, clickable product links, be knowledgeable of the retailer's social media guidelines and be fluent in the retailer's brand messaging.



As retailers adopt new technology solutions, store associates should be able to answer these questions:

When should I reach out to clients?

Associates should be trained to follow up with clients to thank them for in-store visits and purchases, with reminders about holiday shopping along with any in-store promotions, when a favorite item is on sale or newly stocked or with details on in-store events.

How should I reach out to clients?

Associates should know that the majority of shoppers prefer email and text message communication. Extra points for having technology and/or features to support communications to customers who have indicated a preferred method of communication!

What should I reach out to clients about?

Associates should be trained to reach out to clients when an item is ready for pickup, when the retailer restocks a favorite brand, when the store is running sales or promotions (in-store and online) or to make tailored product recommendations. Also consider post-purchase follow up or periodic communication if a customer hasn't made a purchase in a while. Extra bonus points go to retailers who have automated tasks based on purchase history to advise associates about when and what content to send to clients.

Where should I direct my clients to shop online?

Online storefronts, lookbooks, wishlists and editorial content are ideal places for associates to show shoppers their personality, to showcase new items, to curate their list of top recommended items and connect with shoppers.

What company guidelines do I need to follow?

As retailers integrate additional technology tools into their repertoire, it's important to develop policies and guidelines for associates to follow.

Where can I get help?

As the customer experience evolves, retailers need to ensure their customer experience team is ready to support and drive the omnichannel view of customer experience. Associates need to know that it's not just "social media", but it's digital, text messaging, online, ecommerce and mobile. This all needs to be brought together with subject matter experts available to help stores drive the behaviors and best practices to help serve the online customer.

What are our objectives?

Associates must be clear on how to engage with customers and how their engagement will be measured. Retailers and associates should discuss customer engagement strategies, what engagement goals they want to hit, and finally, how they plan to achieve those goals, sales and conversion rates.

Who should I reach out to?

Retailers should integrate CRM data and local client books for associates to use. This data will give them access to accurate email and phone numbers, which are imperative for successful online communications.

Conclusion

Shoppers want and need a seamless shopping experience and need to feel the human touch throughout their entire shopping journey, both online and in-store. They want personalized communication and one-to-one interactions with associates wherever they are shopping, yet most retailers haven't enabled these capabilities yet.

As the needs of the omnichannel shopper continue to evolve, it's important that retailers change, as well. First and foremost, retailers need to equip store associates with the proper hardware and software. Today's shoppers are equipped with smartphones that allow them to comparison shop and look up prices and sales while in-store. Associates should be prepared with the same tools to act as source of knowledge for the shopper, provide product details, similar product recommendations and more.

Retailers then need to train their associates on the right ways to use technology. Even the most powerful tools are ineffective if those using them are unfamiliar with the features and processes. Associates who are properly trained are more likely to build relationships with shoppers, contributing to increased sales for the retailer.

Once associates feel confident navigating new technology, retailers must empower them to market directly to their shoppers. Associates are a brand's most effective representatives, but only if they are able to act as a representative 100% of the time, in-store and online.

Ultimately empowering a store associate to serve both the in-store and online shopper will increase loyalty, sales and provide an enhanced experience.



About Salesfloor

Founded in 2013, Salesfloor (www.salesfloor.net) is a mobile application designed for store associates. The platform provides store associates clienteling tools to personalize the customer experience, digital shopping tools to connect with customers and online storefronts for customers to shop online directly with a local store or favorite associate. Salesfloor currently operates from New York, Montreal and London with a team of retail executives and technologists. Retailers currently using Salesfloor's platform include Saks Fifth Avenue, Toys "R" Us, Lord & Taylor, Harry Rosen, Kiehls' and more.

For more information, please contact:

Julia Lo Basso

Director, Marketing Services

Julia@salesfloor.net

438-798-3232

