



Meet the Store Associate of the Future

# Associate 2.0: The Omnichannel Associate

 Salesfloor |  RETAIL DIVE

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It's a story that has played out countless times since e-commerce began its invasion on brick-and-mortar retail sales: a customer enters your store and works with an associate to identify the best product to purchase, only to find out the store doesn't have her size or color in stock. So, she heads online to find the product and buy it from your company's website, leaving the associate and your store uncredited for their hard work.

Balancing the give and take between a brand's e-commerce website and its brick-and-mortar stores can be a complex operation for retail executives. It can sometimes feel as though your website

is working against your store personnel, enticing customers online with 24/7 access to products and snatching sales from associates who are trying to remain valuable in a fast-evolving retail environment.

While some observers look upon the rash of brick-and-mortar stores closing and proclaim e-commerce the winner of this tug of war, more discerning voices see these changes for what they are: not a retail "apocalypse" so much as a retail "renaissance." Globally, 91% of total retail sales still take place in stores, and multichannel consumers that shop both in-store and online spend twice as much as those who only shop traditionally.

Customers who engage with a retail brand across multiple channels expect a seamless experience across all of them. In a study of 46,000 shoppers, 73% used multiple channels during their shopping journey, and those omnichannel customers had an oversized impact on the retailer's bottom line. As compared to single-channel customers, **omnichannel shoppers spent an average of 4% more each time they visited a store and 10% more online**; they spent more money in the store with each additional channel they used (e.g., mobile apps, buy online/pick up in store or in-store kiosks for online ordering), and they made 23% more repeat visits to the retailer's stores within six months of an omnichannel experience.

## 3 KEY STEPS

There is clearly a role for in-store associates in an omnichannel retail world, but they need support to make the transition. According to the 2017 Temkin Employee Engagement Index, the retail trade has the highest percentage of disengaged employees among 15 industries studied, at 26%; only about half of retail employees (51%) were highly or moderately engaged.

“Many retailers struggle with engaging and evolving their workforce in today’s digital age,” says Oscar Sachs, Co-founder and CEO of Salesfloor. “And yet the in-store associate has been excluded from driving the online business, serving customers in

an omnichannel way, and selling online. Not being involved in the digital space has degraded their important role and the value that they have to offer. Retailers need to find new ways to leverage their people and adapt and evolve their role to serve the customer, which in turn provides associates with the opportunity to learn how to market their brand and sell products through social media, text, and email anywhere in the world.”

**If you’re looking for strategies that can help your in-store associates compete and thrive in this changing environment, here are three steps you can take...**



## Step 1:

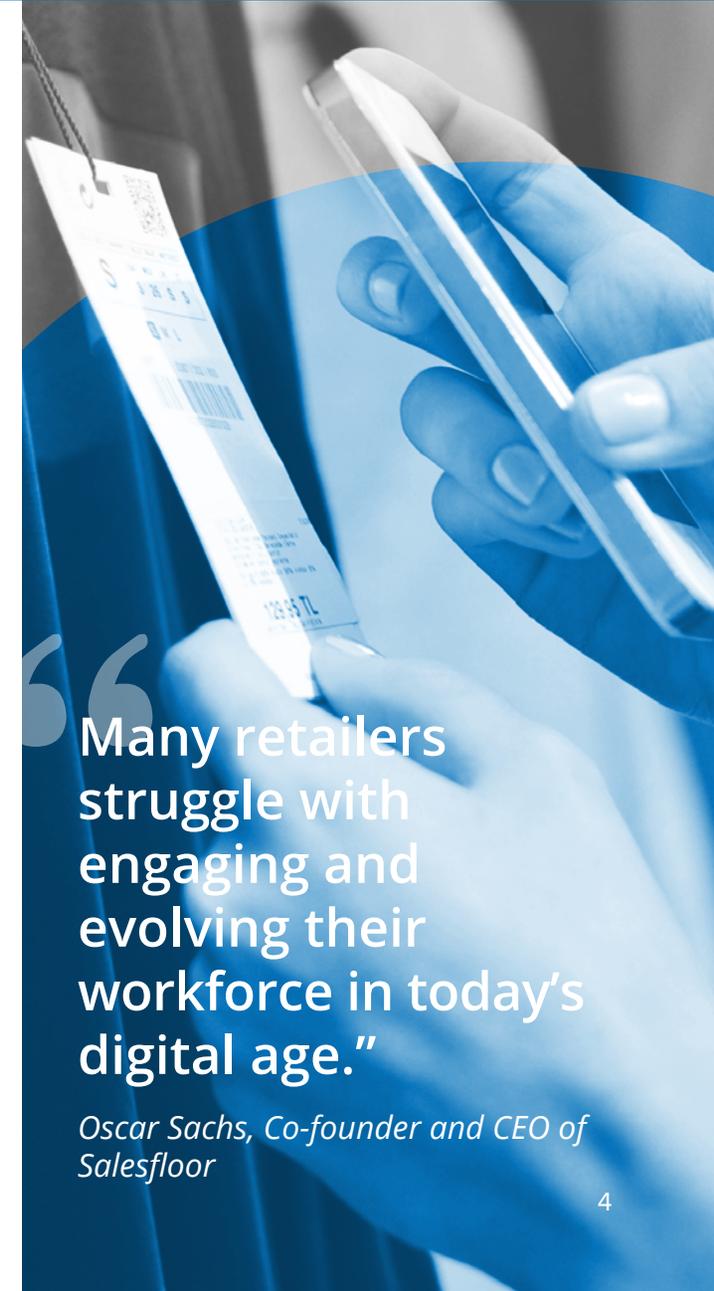
### Train associates to deliver high-touch digital customer service

Customers have a strong desire to tap into the knowledge of in-store associates and receive personalized sales assistance; **87% of shoppers say their purchase is influenced by store personnel**. Technology enables in-store associates to take their customer assistance and influence to a new level, but associates must learn how to engage differently with customers when they have data such as the client's personal profile, purchase history, and suggested recommendations at their fingertips.

For retail leadership, planning the training program that accompanies a new technology rollout is critical, and that training must go beyond merely showing associates how to use new tools. Start by clearly defining the goals and parameters

of the project, making sure everyone on the team is aligned with them. Get input from a test group of staff members who will be using the system, not only to improve the implementation of the project, but also to refine the messages you will convey during the general training.

Provide plenty of technical support. One way to augment the traditional "help desk" model is to designate individuals who can act as product champions for their store, region, or department. Train managers to support associate engagement after system launch by celebrating "wins" and sharing tips for improvement. If you are using an outside technology vendor, ask them for help in identifying and communicating additional best practices.



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Decide which Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be measured to gauge associate performance, frequently share them with associates, and provide training that puts them on a course to achieve those goals. KPIs should also be determined for the training itself, so that the effectiveness of the program can be evaluated.

All along the way, communicate to associates “what’s in it” for them. In addition to all of the other incentives you have built into your program, let associates know that

they are receiving new technology and responsibilities so that they will be able to improve and extend their careers as the retail world changes.

In an industry constantly battling high employee turnover, new technology and training can increase retention. **72% of associates say they are more likely to stay with their current employer if they are given the right digital tools and technology.**

“For almost a decade, retailers have made a natural attempt to become more omnichannel and create a seamless buying experience for the customer, whether the transaction is online or in-store,” says Sachs. “But the last frontier of omnichannel is creating a seamless sales and service experience so that customers can—before they come in store or after they leave—engage and get the right service level from real store associates and finish that transaction directly with the associate.”

## Step 2:

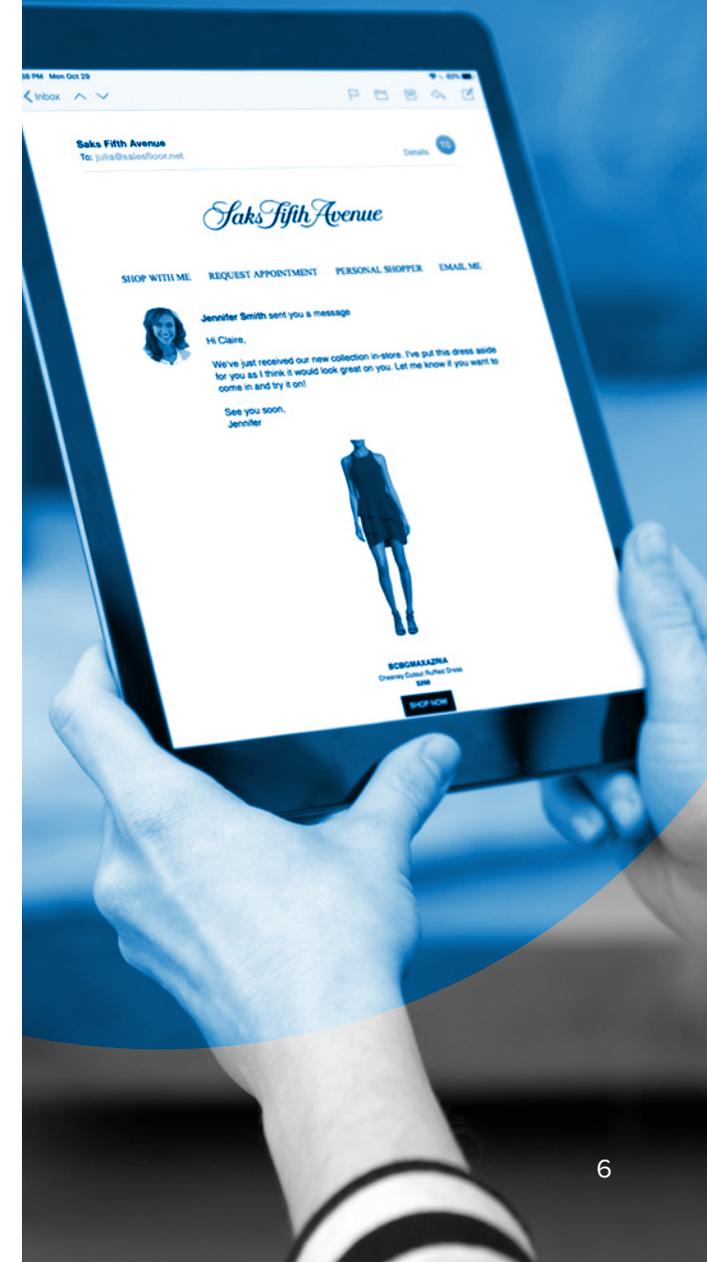
Enable associates to build long-term customer relationships online and off

Even the most advanced omnichannel retailers have not overcome the divide between in-person service and online shopping channels. Customers feel they have two options: they can step into a brick-and-mortar location to receive personalized advice and support, or they can go online, where service and personalization is left to the machines. Shopping online effectively cuts off the personal connection, preventing an associate from owning the sales process end to end and the customer from feeling they're getting a seamless shopping experience.

In order to compete with e-commerce websites that use massive amounts

of customer data to inform purchase suggestions and offer 24/7 convenience, in-store associates need access to technology that allows them to bridge the gap between in-store and online interactions and build long-term client relationships.

**Current technology limits the role an associate can play in the online purchase process, even though 79% of all purchases are influenced by online factors.** While streamlined approaches to inventory can transfer the functional pieces of a customer's online experience to the store – as in the increasingly popular buy online/pick up in store – it's simply too easy for a customer to tap the expertise of an associate in-store and finish the



process online later, either through the same retailer's site, a competitor, or an e-commerce marketplace.

"A customer can spend 30 minutes in a store with an associate and still not be ready to buy," observes Sachs. "At home, that undecided customer has a chance to do any needed online research or at-home checking, such as measuring a room. Once the buying decision is finally made, the customer is not able to use a digital means to finish the conversation that started with the associate. That disconnected sales experience eliminates all the loyalty assets the associate built with the customer, who can buy anywhere online, maybe based on price alone."

A man in a striped shirt is looking at a tablet in a store setting. The background shows shelves with various items, including a large decorative object. A large blue circular graphic is overlaid on the image, containing a quote.

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## Step 3:

Empower associates with tools that make the brand website an ally, not an enemy

When store associates are armed with digital tools, e-commerce and brick-and-mortar channels become complementary rather than competitive, giving customers the best of both worlds: the friendly, in-person support of a dedicated store associate combined with the ability to see and touch products for purchase, enhanced by around-the-clock online support to continue that experience beyond the store.

“When you think about the all-channel experience and winning in the new retail environment, it’s all about traffic and conversions,” says Mark Metrick, President of Saks Fifth Avenue. “For Saks Fifth Avenue, our single largest traffic destination provides 150 million visits to Saks every year, which is ten times the amount that comes in our store. But our

highest conversion channel is our stores. Marrying the two is what’s really going to help us succeed as we go into the future.”

Arm associates to take a leading role in omnichannel retail sales by giving them digital tools to deliver the kind of high-touch digital “clienteling” services your customers are looking for. Clienteling is a new term for an old concept, personalized one-to-one selling, but the difference today is the technology that enables it. With digital technology, store associates can leverage customer data in real time to assist them in doing what they do best—advising, educating, curating, and making recommendations. And the process no longer ends in the store; the associate can bridge the online and offline worlds through such tools as online messaging, texting, and emailing.



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“Retailers that enable in-store associates to serve and sell to online shoppers see tangible results for their business,” adds Ben Rodier, Chief Client Officer of Salesfloor. “These include a **47% increase in online average order value, 10X increase in average online conversion rate and an 18% increase in new customers that purchased.**”

In order to develop omnichannel retail associates who can embrace the brand website as an ally, not an enemy, retailers must equip associates with clienteling solutions that evolve the sales process for associates, bringing a human touch to the digital experience to create a holistic, customer-focused shopping experience online and off.

When you give the customer the ability to finish a transaction directly with the store associate, even after they leave the store, and attribute that online sale to the retail location, you’ve eliminated competition and confusion between the two channels. The website becomes just as much a part of the customer and associate experience as the brick-and-mortar store.

# A HUMAN TOUCH HELPS RETAILERS MAINTAIN CUSTOMER LOYALTY DURING HOLIDAY SALES PERIODS

Black Friday kicks off the holiday shopping season and draws as many as 99.1 million Americans into stores and 108.5 million online to shop. But because Black Friday is so closely associated with markdowns and one-day promotions, high-end retail customers can all too often be drawn away from their favorite stores to chase deals. At least, that's what happens when customers are shopping based only on price. Savvier retailers know that the right tools can empower associates to build strong, long-term relationships, giving customers a reason to stay loyal to their favorite

retailers and brands no matter how many Black Friday discounts stack up.

"Retailers who are evolving to meet the needs of omnichannel shoppers are seeing positive pre-holiday results," said Oscar Sachs, Co-founder and CEO of Salesfloor. "By empowering associates to connect with shoppers across channels and create a personalized relationship, shoppers are more inclined to turn to their trusted associate or store in times when they have access to various deals at multiple retailers."



# CONQUERING THE LAST FRONTIER OF OMNICHANNEL RETAIL

Retailers have entered the last frontier of omnichannel shopping. Customers want retailers to pair the convenience and selection of e-commerce with the intimate feel of an in-person brick-and-mortar experience. The most resourceful retailers will bridge that gap with new technology that empowers employees to become true omnichannel associates: customer service experts equipped with the tools they need to give customers the high-touch, personalized shopping experience they're looking for online and off.



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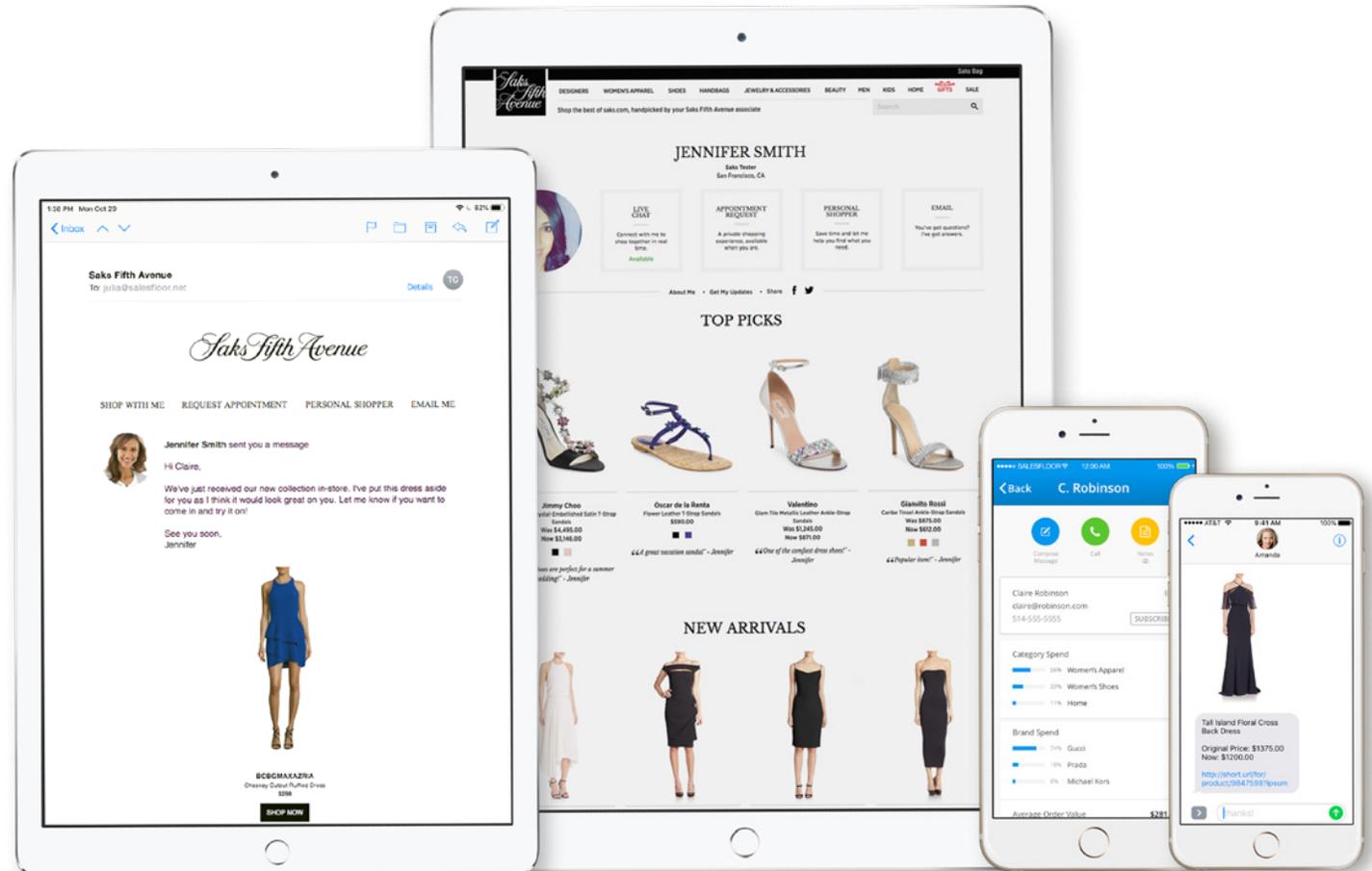
Salesfloor is a mobile app designed for store associates. With Salesfloor, associates are empowered to sell and serve online and in-store customers using text message, email, live chat and live shopping services. Customers can now shop online directly with their store or local sales associate, and benefit from the same high-quality experience online as they receive in-store. The Salesfloor platform is the clienteling solution of choice for some of the most innovative retailers in the world.



# Are you ready to equip your associates with the right tools?

For more information, please contact [sales@salesfloor.net](mailto:sales@salesfloor.net).

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