

VocoVo

eBook

Retail, Disconnected



Retail, Disconnected?

The retail landscape is getting smarter, with new technologies continuously being introduced to transform customer experience (CX) and improve operational efficiencies. On the surface, this seems to be the perfect solution to ease the challenges created by the pandemic and meet heightened customer expectations for personalised and seamless shopping experiences. However, the decisions to take on emerging tools and to adopt bold digital strategies are often being made in the boardroom, without consulting shop floor colleagues.

This siloed decision making can prove to be a costly mistake. A lack of understanding at board level about current technology adoption rates and what additional tools colleagues would find helpful can perpetuate a disconnect, which can lead to poor morale and ultimately, negatively impact CX. Sometimes it can be as simple as the solutions used by one department being incompatible with another, or adoption could be lower from store to store because of insufficient training.

The disconnect between head office plans and the challenges faced by colleagues on the shop floor must

therefore be resolved if retailers are to realise the full potential of technology, subsequently attracting new customers and boosting staff retention in an increasingly competitive labour market.

Retail technology solutions provider, VoCoVo undertook a survey of both in-store employees and decision makers at retailers with over 100 stores across the UK, North America and Germany. This included 1,003 colleagues with over six months' experience in retail and 258 senior retail decision makers.

The research set out to understand the true scale of the disconnect between the technology needed in store and the technology that head offices have implemented so far or have future plans to do so. With a focus on smart technology adoption rates and the biggest challenges being faced by customer-facing colleagues, the findings have shone a light on three key areas where this disconnect must be addressed to ensure a truly connected retail experience for all.



1. Are new smart technology investments actually what shop floor colleagues need?

Although the benefits of smart technology on the shop floor are huge, realising them might be hindered because head offices don't have a full picture of the pain points that customer-facing colleagues deal with. This is highlighted by the way colleagues feel about leadership.

30%

of retail colleagues **don't think head office has an accurate understanding of their challenges.**

Retailers could be throwing money away, risking low adoption rates and still battling the same problems on the shop floor after implementation, simply because new tech isn't fit for purpose.

This is a concerning discovery as 63% of retailers are planning to implement more smart solutions in their stores in the next year. If greater effort isn't made to bridge the communication distance between the head office and shop floor colleagues, retailers could risk spending money on technology that is nice-to-have rather than necessity – particularly as 41% of colleagues feel their head office doesn't consider their needs when choosing new smart solutions.

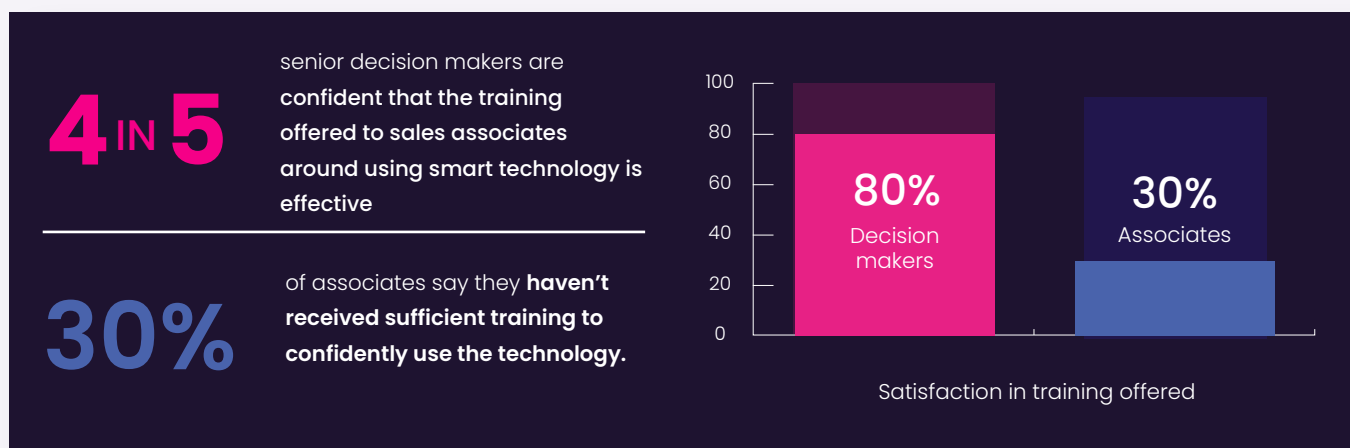


There is a simple solution, however, to ensure new technology investments are the right ones to ease the challenges faced by customer-facing colleagues.

The panacea for closing this disconnect is opening an honest dialogue and fostering transparent communication between colleagues and head offices. Whether it's via an online feedback survey or team meetings, colleagues should be offered a variety of clear channels to voice their opinions and share pain-points – and equally suggest solutions – whilst decision makers should demonstrate they can actively listen and use the insights from their shop floor colleagues to guide their decision making.

It's a win-win both ways as retailers will be better positioned to invest in solutions that are actually needed, whilst colleagues can leverage new technology to make their jobs easier.

2. A training blind spot



This blind spot could be impeding the efforts to successfully roll out smart technology solutions across stores. A lack of comprehensive and regular training on the use of smart technology doesn't just affect colleagues. It has a knock-on effect on CX as poorly trained colleagues are more prone to making mistakes and struggle to effectively use the tech available to them. As a result, they may keep customers waiting while they search for information or technology functionality, causing frustrations or even walkouts.

The risk of worsening customer service isn't the only reason for addressing the training disconnect. Just **over three**

quarters (76%) of colleagues are covering additional responsibilities because their stores are short-staffed. In this turbulent labour market, technology could be the answer store managers need to unlock greater efficiency, productivity and ensure better team morale in busy periods.

Closing the gap on training is crucial not only to maximise the smart technology investments, but also to ensure devices are fully supporting colleagues in delivering better CX, making them feel safer and improving efficiencies until labour shortages resolve.

Importantly, training cannot be a one-off exercise, either at the start of a colleague's employment or at the point of new technology being implemented. It should be revisited frequently to ensure best practice is maintained, particularly if new smart devices are introduced that impact existing functionality.

In addition, it's important retailers consider how they're delivering training to help with its effectiveness across different employee demographics. Whilst younger, more tech-savvy colleagues might need less time to grasp all the functionality of smart devices, other colleagues might need more. Therefore, personalising training to individuals is crucial. If it's common practice to deliver the training as a 30-minute sit-down meeting in the boardroom, it might be more beneficial to switch the approach and deploy on-the-job training under the supervision of a more experienced colleague. This will speed up the onboarding process and create an engaging refresher training experience, allowing greater connectivity to sweep across the retail stores.

3. Reassurance needed over the role of human employees in the future

After the challenging two years working through a global pandemic, retailers need to keep team morale high to ensure retention in a competitive labour market.

Whilst there are plenty of day-to-day advantages of smart devices for retail colleagues, technology can also introduce a surprising level of uncertainty. Especially when it comes to the future of retail, and colleagues' place in that vision

85%

of senior decision makers consider the role of human employees important

34%

of colleagues worry they will eventually be replaced by smart technology

Whether it's because the head office continues to introduce new smart solutions in stores making colleagues feel insecure about their jobs or the media continues to highlight business stories about robots replacing humans in retail environments, there needs to be clearer communication

and reassurance from the top to put colleagues' worries at bay. Whilst technology will continue to evolve and provide exciting new experiences for shoppers, the human touch will still play a key role in the future of retail.



It should be a priority for head office teams to ensure that colleagues understand that and can fully embrace the functionalities of smart devices knowing they're there to help, not threaten, their positions. Open and honest conversations as part of change management around that should happen to highlight the exciting opportunities smart tech offers. This will also help with future recruitment as those wishing to pursue a career in retail would want to know their progression opportunities.

Company meetings can provide a good forum for this kind of communication. Store managers and head office teams can leverage these moments to address colleagues' concerns, reassure them they'll be a vital part of the shop floor in the future and set out the vision of how smart technology will integrate into their jobs.

Retail, Reconnected.



With retail stores becoming more and more connected, it's time to pause and re-evaluate whether the technology currently implemented is meeting expectations and easing the biggest challenges faced by customer-facing colleagues. Addressing the above three key areas of disconnect will help to reduce barriers that are hindering retailers' abilities to fully leverage smart devices, and instead, reconnect heads offices with shop floor teams.

At the heart of closing the highlighted disconnects should always be transparent and open communication between the decision makers and colleagues. Whether it's training effectiveness or the role of human employees in the future, being on the same page when it comes to smart technology implementation will not only help maximise retailers' return on investment, but also increase colleagues' job satisfaction, boost team morale, and retention.

With smart technology working alongside human colleagues, and fully embraced by them, retailers can realise their vision of truly connected stores that customers want to visit time and time again.



About VoCoVo

Established in 2016, VoCoVo drives transformation in retail communications to maximize operational efficiency and enhance customer experience for leading global retailers. Now connecting over 100,000 associates in 21 countries through voice, their retail-ready hardware, software, and smart integrations power store teams across Grocery, Home Improvement, and Fashion.

VoCoVo is growing fast and is trusted by household names in the UK, Europe, Australia, and North America. The company has a list of accolades, from regional Business of the Year and Innovation awards to 5th place in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100.



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