



Transform Holiday Retail Operations with Communication and Collaboration

By Roopa Misra, SVP of Customer Operations, [Orion](#)
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The second holiday season of the pandemic is almost here. And, after two tumultuous years, retailers are still navigating the volatility driving uncertainty across their operations. Global supply chain and logistics limitations are constricting retailers' ability to meet consumer demand. Labor shortages mean store leaders must meet surging holiday demand with fewer workers. And changing consumer habits challenge retailers to prepare new ways to deliver superior service in a holiday season like no other.

Today's consumers are savvier than ever and have access to an increasing amount of product information and reviews before they ever enter a store. They expect store associates to be experts, offering unique insights and knowledge unobtainable from at home on the couch. Consumers want greater flexibility and convenience for how they shop, too. The rise of new shopping channels like BOPIS (buy-online-pickup-in-store), BOPAC (buy-online-pickup-at-curb), and same-day-delivery requires retailers to innovate new ways to manage inventory, stock pick, view order status, and provide customers with notifications.

Along with changing habits, consumer demand in 2021 continues to grow, surpassing expectations and previewing a holiday shopping season with even higher growth. Retailers are compensating now by adding over 700,000 seasonal jobs that will require instant, on-the-go training to get up to speed fast. In addition, seasonal hiring challenges are further amplified by an industry plagued by high turnover.

From their first day on the job, each worker is critical to generating an outstanding customer experience. Retailers must empower their existing, new, and seasonal employees to meet high-customer expectations with solutions that support the experience customers expect at every moment and touch-point in the store. To do this, retailers should examine the technology that underpins and connects their operations from warehouse to retail floor.

Here are some of the ways a voice-activated, intelligent, digital communication and collaboration platform transforms retail operations:

Improved Customer Experience

Forrester predicts brick-and-mortar retail sales will continue to account for 72% of all U.S. retail sales by 2024. And Bain & Company estimates that poor service makes customers four times more likely to shop with a competitor. These studies are just further evidence of what retailers have always known, that a stellar in-store customer experience is of utmost importance.

So how do retailers deliver an impeccable customer experience this holiday season?

The first key is an empowered and knowledgeable employee. All workers — including contractors and seasonal workers — need the seamless ability to retrieve critical information from retail systems, training manuals, and subject matter experts that help them improve customer experience. Current technology requires associates to look at a scanning device, leave the customer and walk to a POS system, or physically search the store to locate an SME. Instead, frontline retail employees need the ability to answer common questions such as “what is the price of an unmarked item” and “do you have my size in the back” by using AI-powered Voice Price Check and Voice Inventory Check bots — all while maintaining eye contact and engagement with customers.

Retailers will need to go further than providing associates access to inventory and pricing systems this holiday season. Each floor associate must be ready to provide unmatched, customized insights to meet consumer needs. Collaboration technology connects retail associates to SME’s like sommeliers or tech experts to answer questions. Regardless of the SME’s location — in-store, regional operations, or headquarters — they are an accessible asset so associates can make personalized recommendations, crossells, and upsells to customers with the correct information.

Communication and collaboration platforms also employ voice triggers that start game-changing, automated workflows and fast action by retail employees. For example, a register employee uses voice to retrieve an item price from an inventory database. In another example, a customer would like to access a locked case of a high-value product. Customers push a button that deploys the closest available associate to unlock the case and guide them through their purchasing process, ensuring a large sale is not lost. Employees accomplish tasks faster from their point of work — all while remaining heads up and engaged with customers.

Customers want a quick, seamless experience — no matter the channel. Wait times are constrained by two resources: available employees and technology. Marrying these two resources, retailers that automate their worker’s everyday routine and procedural tasks free associates to serve the next customer sooner. A retail communication and collaboration platform supports associates as they quickly locate products for customers, whether they are in the store with them, buying online and

picking up in-store (BOPIS) or at the curb (BOPAC). The digital platform alerts team members when customers are ready to pick their items up in the store or at the curb, so customers always receive a memorable, fast, and satisfactory experience.

Improved Employee Engagement

According to the National Retail Federation, the average employee turnover for the U.S. retail industry is over 60% — ultimately costing employers time and money to hire and train each new employee. At the same time, low employee engagement is a significant drain on resources. Quantum Workplace's Employee Engagement Trends Report found that 35% of retail employees are not engaged. Retailers must take steps to address the high employee turnover and low employee engagement that impact their bottom line.

One solution is to implement technology that streamlines training and onboarding time so new or seasonal employees get up-to-speed faster and gain fulfillment from knowing they are helping customers have a good experience. Communication and collaboration platforms engage, motivate, empower workers with automation and information that makes their jobs easier, simplifies processes, and supports them at their points of work. When employees can access SMEs or guides instantly, they add significant value to today's more informed customers. Associates take greater satisfaction in their jobs when they can customize insights for each customer. And automating routine tasks removes a burden that allows team members to better focus on improving customer experience, increasing product turnover, and ultimately driving profit.

Communication and collaboration platforms also provide voice-first multimodal collaboration that includes high-quality push-to-talk audio, text, and visual media across any of their company devices. When workers seamlessly communicate in flexible ad hoc, 1:1, or group environments, they stay connected and engaged to their teams.

Decreased Stockouts

Deloitte predicts sales will be up seven to nine percent, creating urgency for retailers to find new ways to meet demand. At the same time, current global supply chain bottlenecks are expected to last for months. As a result, stockouts are a likely and unfortunate reality for retailers this holiday season.

And stockouts hurt. Harvard Business Review (HBR) notes that 40% of customers won't purchase an alternative product or will instead purchase the product from a competitor. This year, the problem may be hard to avoid. However, phantom stockouts can be avoided. Phantom stockouts are when everything has gone right along the entire supply chain, products arrive at the store, and simple mistakes mean customers can't find the item, a rising problem and a drain on revenue.

Nearly 17% of stockouts are actually phantom stockouts, found HBR. A communication and collaboration platform mitigates this issue by increasing the precision

of inventory lookup, item location, in-store picking, and real-time communication between store employees and with store managers. Inventory levels are managed from the floor or at the point of work by engaged employees, so stock levels are continuously optimized, phantom stockouts are reduced, and customers more readily find the right product.

Increased Operational Control

Retail managers and supervisors require centralized visibility and control across a complex network of warehouses, fulfillment centers, distribution hubs, transportation fleets, and stores. Intelligent communication and collaboration platforms deliver greater operational control by connecting workers to teams, regional managers, and headquarters. Each voice, text, image, or video communication and location data point is recorded and stored, forming a voice operations system of record.

Advanced location services create visibility and show precisely where each team member is. Operations managers track drivers on delivery routes, see how many team members are active in a warehouse, and locate team members on the retail floor. Managers act with real-time information enabling them to respond to customer assistance requests faster or redeploy additional team members to high-traffic areas like cash registers.

Organizations gain operational control when they capitalize on this wealth of communication and location information generated by workers. This data provides the real-time operations enterprises need to enhance productivity and drive profit. Once the entire message stream is captured, operations centers can analyze, measure, and optimize retail performance.

A Voice Operations System of Record That Improves Store Operations

This holiday season, retailers face numerous challenges across their operations that are easily addressed with a voice-activated, intelligent, digital communications and collaboration platform. Organizations that unlock the benefits of digital transformation with intelligent, voice-first collaboration will create a responsive and resilient retail store that will drive profit and productivity unmatched by their competition.

Roopa Misra is SVP of Customer Operations at Orion, the leading voice-first, intelligent platform that empowers the retail industry's deskless workers by enabling real-time team collaboration, process automation, location mapping, and access to enterprise systems to improve workforce productivity, safety and compliance, and customer engagement.