

RBTE: Big themes from Europe's biggest Retail show

The Pierhouse team joined thousands of visitors, retailers and exhibitors at the Retail Business Technology Expo in London to discuss the challenges and themes dominating the retail agenda. It was a chance to experience the latest industry solutions and innovations. One that caused much attention was the [RoboSavvy Double](#) - a remote controlled device with a tablet screen providing customers and staff access to remote experts who can provide advice and technical support. Wearable technology, smart changing rooms and a vast array of other retail solutions were also on display.

We were proud to showcase our leading edge NetTickIT® software with OKI's Multifunction Printers. This collaboration combines our smart in-store signage capability with OKI's retail printing technology, delivering in-store innovation to the retail market. For more information please [click here](#).

There were six big themes at RBTE and this reports looks at all in more detail:

- Omnichannel - lessons to be learnt & how to achieve multichannel success
- Big data - What, when & how
- Internet of Things (IoT) - How and why to incorporate innovation
- Mobility - Transforming staff, payments & customer interactions
- Content - Personalisation and the single view of the customer
- IT budgets - What is top on the Retail agenda for IT investment

The underlining message across all streams was this: **the customer isn't just right, they are now in control.** Price transparency, mobility, real time availability and enhanced supply chains mean that the customer decides which channels to engage with and when. "Don't dictate to customers which channel they should be in" said Paul Coby, IT Director John Lewis otherwise you risk losing them to a competitor. Provide access across all of your channels and be ready to serve the customer at any touch point along the journey.



"Retail must be real time, not offline"

*- Andrew Harrison
Dixons Carphone*

Omnichannel

This subject dominated the conference with retail experts in agreement that there are three main barriers to overcome to implement effective omnichannel strategy.

Firstly your back end IT must be robust and offer the ability to enable the addition of new technologies. Without the basics in place, the end goal can never succeed.

Secondly people are critical to driving success of any omnichannel strategy. In-house skills are paramount to implement core functions, analytics and operations. However managing change within the stores themselves is also essential so that the workforce understands strategy and is fully skill enabled to action this directly with customers providing an environment that makes shoppers want to keep coming back.

Thirdly focusing on the end goal and not losing sight of the customer in the process.

One of the panel sessions asked the question what will omnichannel look like in 2017? There were some interesting predictions:

- No pure play retailers will exist – the store will remain critical to retail success as customers have an in built desire to see and interact with brands and products before committing to buy. Online will become the flagship store supporting other physical stores
- Any device, anytime, anywhere, mobile, voice activated all supported by social media and shared communities
- There will be no reference made to omnichannel as this will be common retailing. It will be expected that retail means one focus, no channels
- That retailers will have worked out how to make all channels profitable, overcoming delivery and supply chain challenges to achieve this
- The value proposition will be clear – customers will have personalised interactions with retailers and a social, entertaining experience
- A single view of the customer and a single view of data
- Mobile payments will be expected and wearable technology will be much more widely adopted



"The cost of failure in omnichannel is very expensive to put right. Do the basics fantastically well and then add enhanced services"

– Andy Banks, Waitrose Supply Chain Development



Big data

There was agreement that while there is too much hype around the term big data, there is a genuine need to get to grips with the insight that is hidden within all of the existing retail data. This can add real competitive advantage and unlock what makes individual customers tick and act in certain ways. However this came with a health warning. The data must be good quality and just because you can doesn't mean you should. In other words don't overcomplicate. Customers want simplicity – the right message, at the right time to the right audience, so don't lose sight of the overall customer benefit.

“Big data is an enabler that needs to be actioned”

– Ed Child Head of customer data & marketing effectiveness, Asda



Internet of Things (IoT)

The market is booming with the number of connected devices way exceeding the number of people. The market is expected to reach \$4.6 trillion by 2018 (source IDC). The key components underpinning the future of retail are mobility, cloud, big data and social, and IoT links directly to this as the new generation data platform. In retail RFID, beacons, GPS and M2M are seen as critical tools in IoT implementations, but in the future biometrics, wearable technology and augmented reality will also play an important part. While 60% of retailers in an IDC US study revealed that they were actively pursuing an IoT strategy, the cost of many technologies has acted as a barrier to entry. The general feeling from the retail speakers at RBTE was that while these technologies are exciting many are still to be convinced as to whether the expense would deliver the ROI, whilst competing against other core IT spend.



Mobility

Another hot topic of discussion was around mobility – for payments, for staff and for customers. It clearly is the future for interacting with customers and staff, but data privacy is a big concern for retailers. There was split opinion as to how far to take customer interactions with some wanting to remain more passive in approach as opposed to others who want to fully embrace a mobile strategy pushing marketing messages directly to customer’s devices. However all believe that trust is at the heart of retailing therefore customer data must be guarded at all costs. There was also agreement that while mobile payments have increased, it could still be a whole generation until wide scale adoption by consumers.

“Digital driven innovation matters in a world being changed by technology”

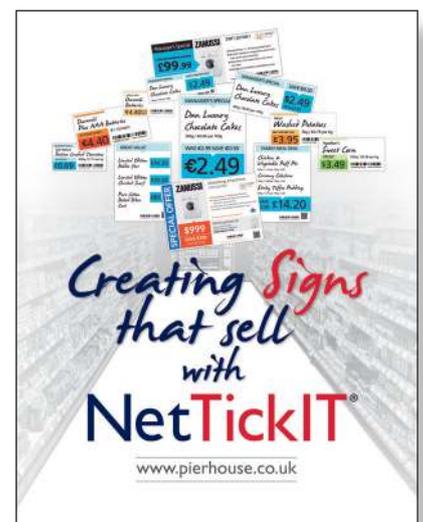
*– Paul Coby IT Director
John Lewis*

Content is king

Retailers are embracing social communities and engagements and increasingly needing to create tailored marketing content. Some highlighted this as a real challenge. “We are not Publishers. We are Retailers” said Tim Curtis Multi-Channel Director, Dobbies Garden Centres. Providing great personalisation and rewarding customers through loyalty is seen as a very important area in the next 3 years.

IT budgets under strain

Retailers commented that overall IT budgets are on the increase as the pace of change is so fast that it costs money just to stand still in terms of competing effectively. The line between marketing and technology spend has blurred and this has led to more complexity. The panellists on this topic were in agreement that back end systems need to be the focus before large scale innovation can be implemented, but they added that it was critical to have adaptable frameworks to enable new technologies going forward. IT budgets are moving to business units where strategy is demanding a swifter response to the changing customer and competitive landscape. Solutions are being deployed that seamlessly integrate and are ‘best of breed’ enabling immediate return on investment without compromising the more extensive strategic changes that are underway.



An in-store action plan

The Top 10 ways to connect with your customers in-store

The retail world has been permanently disrupted and power has passed to the hands of the modern day shopper. We've pulled together insights from the experts at RBTE to produce our own 10 point plan for in-store success.

- **Improve operational efficiency** – Have a clear roadmap for improving your back end IT but be clear on your end goals for serving the customer. Adapt business processes to accelerate the sales process and improve the customer experience providing a seamless experience across all channels. Mobility is a key to bringing this transformation
- **Personalisation** – Embrace the power of mobile, connecting directly with your customers via their Smartphones using Beacons to enable targeted promotions and a personalised shopper experience to inspire loyalty, but don't forget to safeguard customer data
- **Empower staff** – For omnichannel to succeed shop staff need to be technology-enabled and well informed in order to meet the demands and expectations of modern shoppers. Incentivise, train and put them at the heart of strategy providing feedback of success
- **Big data** – Turn insights into real time execution to maximise ROI & capture all selling opportunities. Use experts to interpret the data and unite channels for the big picture. Be selective in what you do and don't forget that whatever you do it must benefit the customer
- **Revolutionise your retail space** – Clear signage, great product range, fast payments and expert customer service. Make sure the store is as engaging and informative as online
- **Value added services** – Convenience is king to the modern day shopper. Exploit click and collect & ship to store opportunities to bring customers to you but make sure you have the back end systems in place to support this
- **Digitalise the store** – Enable access to product reviews and social media to support the customer buying journey. Guide your customers through the store with mobile applications to maximise your sales
- **Bring the cloud in-store** – Wi Fi and cloud-based applications will meet the needs of the modern shopper
- **Dynamic pricing** – Customers demand price transparency and consistency across mobile, digital and physical channels. Update your pricing at the touch of a button with Electronic Shelf Labels & ensure consistent, compliant paper shelf edge labels to bring real time retail
- **The Internet of Things (IoT)** – Modern day customers have driven disruption in the retail market with the use of technology. Embrace in-store innovations and bring technology in-store, such as shelf replenishment, augmented reality and shopping apps to drive loyalty and encourage the customer to connect with you. Don't be afraid to be a pioneer and disrupt the market for yourself, but make sure it fits with your overall end goals