

HOW TO GET

ONE STEP

AHEAD

Surviving The Retail
Transformation

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It's no secret that the last 18 months or so have been a bit of a roller coaster ride (to put it lightly). As we all know, the retail industry is an essential part of the economy, comprising almost **5.1% of UK GDP.**

Another thing we know is that the events of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the public health crisis that followed, have had massive implications for the UK and global economies.

The retail industry in particular found itself severely impacted from day one of lockdown restrictions, which have led to major changes in the goods and services that we consume and how we consume them.



A NEW DIRECTION

When nonessential high street retail stores were forced into lockdown in March 2020, it was only the likes of food retail, pharmacies and petrol stations that were left fully open for business as usual.

This marked the beginning of a mass retail exodus, as customers were forced to abandon their favourite high street haunts and turn instead to the world of ecommerce.

Over the course of the Covid crisis, many high street retailers have experienced some dark days – faced with bankruptcy, redundancies and the liquidation of their bricks and mortar stores. Now, over a year and a half on, many retailers are staring down the real implications of the 'new normal' – as it's clear that the pandemic has not only affected future financial outlooks, but altered the long-term roadmap of the retail industry forever.

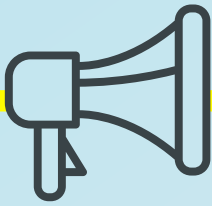
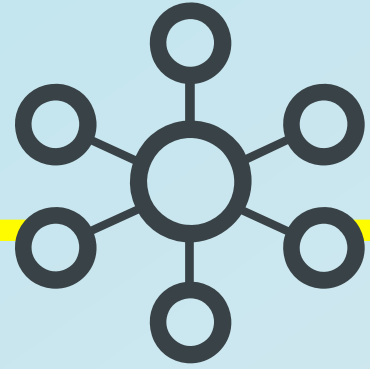
It's not all so bleak. Although the pandemic wreaked havoc with certain sectors of the retail industry (such as clothing and department stores), some areas actually started to thrive, particularly when it came to online sales figures. In fact, overall, UK online sales rose to a **record high of 33.9%** as a share of all retail spending. After a while, spending patterns began to emerge, and the introduction of the second UK lockdown in November 2020 saw yet another spike in online spending activity.

This, once again, reinforced how closures of nonessential retail stores led to behavioural changes in how buyers were choosing to shop. This second boost could have been bolstered by a tempting wave of online Black Friday promotions and discounts, as shoppers were increasingly reliant on digital platforms in the lead up to Christmas.

It's clear that, while retail isn't exactly on the decline, it's gone through some irrevocable, and (dare we say it) unprecedented changes – with the migration to a more online focused approach proving impossible to ignore.



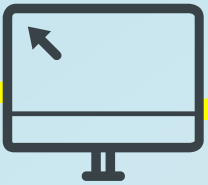
THE NEW MINDSET OF CUSTOMERS



56%

of consumers have tried a new retailer during the pandemic.

*(Narvar.2020 State of Returns Survey)



40%

of customers said they're buying more things than they normally do online.

*(Forrester Analytics Consumer Technographics® COVID-19 Survey)

33%



don't plan to resume normal shopping habits immediately.

*(Forrester Analytics Consumer Technographics® COVID-19 Survey)



A SPEEDIER SERVICE

In order for retailers to thrive in the face of this online shift – it's essential for businesses to establish a digital infrastructure that can fully meet the needs and expectations of increasingly demanding customers.

One of the major ways many retailers kept up with the needs of their customers was by implementing hybrid systems such as click & collect, which saw an explosion in popularity during the Covid crisis. The click & collect service became a more reliable and safe method of receiving goods when delivery services became overwhelmed. Not only did it prove to be highly efficient for both customers and sellers, it more or less eliminated the element of human contact – alleviating many of the safety fears shoppers felt at the height of the pandemic. As online shopping is also fast becoming the favourite way for older generations to shop, click & collect is an increasingly important feature for the senior generation. But it's not just them - it's predicted that over 58.5% of the UK population used a click & collect service over the last year, and it certainly looks likely that those figures will continue to grow beyond the pandemic, with many retailers now even offering click & collect pickups in under an hour.

So, as you can see, the retail market is an ever-changing landscape - particularly now. Each passing week sees new figures, changing shopping habits and developing technology trends. With that in mind, it's more important than ever that retailers keep their ear to the ground and their eyes on the ball when it comes to emerging trends and tech. To help you stay one step ahead of the Covid transformation curve, we'll take a look at the main trends and issues to watch out for - especially when it comes to selecting the perfect network for your business.



NO TIME FOR DOWNTIME

With online and traditional retail merging into one customer experience, one of the biggest challenges that retailers face in this new landscape is the ever-present threat of downtime.

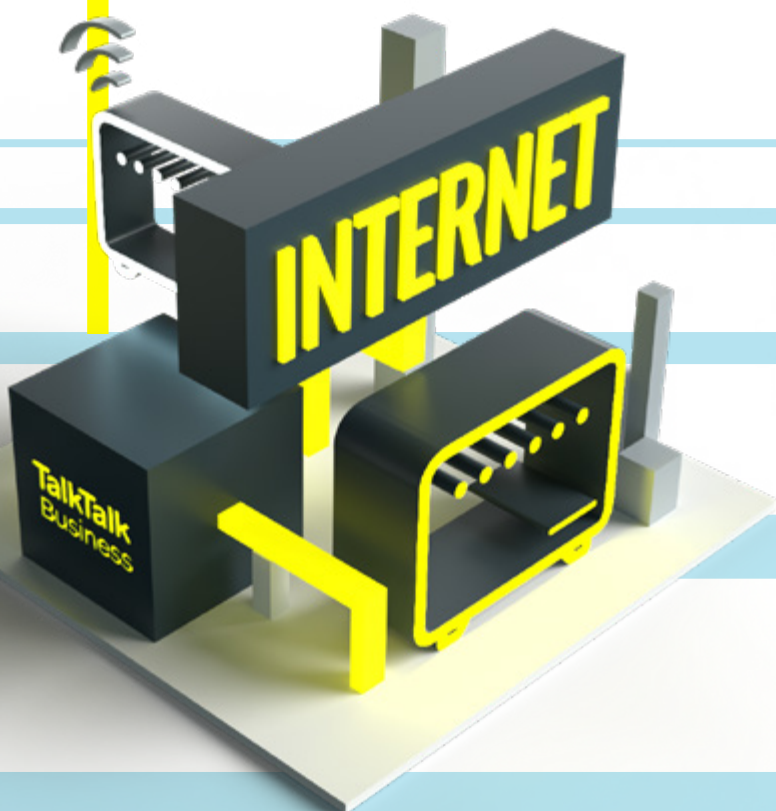
A recent study found that a whopping 81% of retailers experience downtime at least once a year, with a huge 87% of retailers experiencing outages that lasted around four hours or more. Despite this, 20% still don't have a backup connectivity solution in place.

Online shoppers have become increasingly impatient too. More than 40% of online buyers will simply move to another website if a page takes more than three seconds to load. If such a tiny amount of time can make such a big

difference, imagine the negative implications of your entire online store being unreachable for hours at a time with no payment systems, or even phone lines.

It's not just your customers you have to consider here: it's your employees too. With some retailers still operating in a work from home setting, it's also imperative that your network provider can reliably facilitate more flexible working in a secure and robust setting. This is essential, as legacy networks are simply not designed to deliver the on-demand experience that employees now require to do their jobs effectively from home. Not only are the expectations different, but so is the traffic, the applications and the load.

It's important that your business gets a handle on any mobility and data management issues, which put further pressure on bandwidth, as businesses with inadequate connectivity are being crippled by limited capacity and frustrating time lags. To add to this, the rise of bring your own device (BYOD) schemes and the location of mission critical data beyond the firewall is leaving end-users open to more security threats without proper protection. That's why it's more important than ever to reduce the risk of downtime by partnering with a network provider who can protect both your customers and your employees across such varied end points.



TURNING TO THE CLOUD

Another retail trend that's becoming more common is the fact that many enterprises are looking to the cloud to build an infrastructure that's resilient and effective, instead of simply adding hardware, paying for multiple routers or setting up firewalls. Cloud services are helping the retail industry in a whole host of ways from slashing the costs of infrastructure, computing and storage, to giving real time access to inventory and operational data.

Other benefits also include far more efficient stock replenishment, better data security, improved user experience, and crucially, disaster management and recovery that businesses can rely on in times of crisis.



NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE NEW WORLD

So what about the rest of the post-Covid trends that are set to transform the retail landscape? Here are some more key changes to keep an eye out for and implement, to feel fully prepared for a decidedly digital road ahead.



Prepare for a surge in in-store technology

As bricks and mortar stores reopen their doors, shoppers will return, however they'll only be doing so when and if they really need and want to - for example to book in for a personal shopping experience or for a VR experience in a showroom. Stores are certainly having to work much harder to entice their customers back through the doors, as this time, the in-store experience expectations of customers are much higher. This will mainly be driven by the extent to which stores can thoughtfully integrate technologies including digitised product displays, POS counters/self-serve kiosks, real-time inventory information and mobile customer loyalty systems. Picking the perfect digitisation elements is the best way to deliver an immersive customer experience - meaning that picking the perfect digital solutions partner is also of the utmost importance, to help you deliver on these implementations.



Contactless is now king

It's no secret that customers prefer a touchless buying process in the wake of the Covid crisis. Whether this is through mobile input, self-service or platform-based solutions - customers and staff can benefit from reduced form filling and faff. Contactless buying not only reduces the time needed to check information, but also lowers the number of errors - as payment is no longer taken manually. It's also considered a much safer option than handling cash, helping to somewhat allay the fears of many customers throughout the pandemic.



Virtual 'try before you buy' reimagines the shopping experience

Did you know that **69% of shoppers abandon their carts before completing a purchase?**

This is huge evidence that retailers need to be working much harder to convert their online browsers into buyers. Virtual reality is an emerging technology that could prove to be the answer to this problem, along with its sister technology, augmented reality. VR and AR tools have the potential to reshape the world of retail, especially when it comes to giving customers the chance to explore digital showrooms, or even try on clothes virtually, using 3D body scan technology, in the absence of actual fitting rooms.



Voice commerce capabilities will carry on thriving

With voice recognition processing becoming increasingly popular, we're witnessing the increasing prevalence of smart speakers such as Amazon's Echo, Google Home, and Apple's HomePod. Each of these have voice recognition technology that can be harnessed to carry out online shopping for consumers, without them having to lift a finger. Just like e-commerce and mobile shopping brought ultimate convenience to customers, voice commerce could be the next natural step in customer experience enhancement. TalkTalk Business has long been providing voice commerce technologies for some of the biggest retailers in the UK. It's a technology revolution that shows absolutely no signs of being silenced in the future.





PICKING THE RIGHT PARTNER

As well as investing in new technologies and speedy means of service, it's also essential that retailers put careful thought into choosing the right digital solutions provider for their needs and those of their customers.

Partnering with the right network provider means so much more for the success of your retail business than ever before. Gone are the days when this was just about simple website support and troubleshooting your internet connectivity. Today's retailers need robust and resilient digital solutions more than ever, as the technological challenges of the post-Covid world continue to stack up and become more complex and demanding.

This choice will affect everything from the smooth running of your ecommerce website to your in-store digital signage, POS systems, digital touchpoints – right through to your in-store Wi-Fi and digital loyalty systems. The list is long and forever growing. So in a world that doesn't stand still for long, it's important that you select a provider whose solutions can evolve with your business. One that's scalable, affordable and reliable. One just like TalkTalk Business.

**HOW CAN TALKTALK
BUSINESS HELP
WITH YOUR RETAIL
ENTERPRISE?**

BESPOKE, MANAGED SOLUTIONS

At TalkTalk Business, we know that every business is different, which is why we don't believe in a 'one-size-fits-all' solution for your retail company. Our expert teams will help to pair you with the perfect package to fully meet every one of your bespoke network and infrastructure needs.

The scope of our retail network offering might just surprise you too. As well as providing our fast, dependable and affordable Broadband and Fibre packages – we also offer our retail partners a range of essential and disruptive technical solutions, ranging from 10Gb connectivity to networking, voice technology and even our new CCTV services. We work closely with some of the biggest British retail names around and have supported businesses big and small through the Covid challenges they've faced over the last 18 months.



RELIABILITY & FLEXIBILITY FOR BUSINESSES OF ALL SIZES

We've invested heavily in our far-reaching, future-proof network – and it shows. More than 95% of the UK is covered by our Next Generation Network, which offers 99.995% reliability, while our exclusive partnerships with alt-net providers means that we can offer Full Fibre connectivity on a scale that no-one else can come close to.

TRUSTED EXPERTS, WITH YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

After over 25 years in the business, we know retail connectivity like the back of our hands – and our scalable services offer spans from SoHo to SME to Enterprise level companies.

So, if it's scalability, affordability and availability that you're looking for, you need not look any further than TalkTalk Business. The one constant you can rely on in this ever-changing digital landscape is our promise to keep you connected, no matter where you are, or what the world throws at us next.

A STRESS-FREE SERVICE

We're always on hand to provide ongoing, attentive support with your enterprise solution needs. TalkTalk Business's expansive team of UK-based customer service professionals will be on the other side of the phone in a flash to troubleshoot and guide you, should you ever need our expertise.

And if it's more long-term support you're after, you can rely on your dedicated account manager. They'll work to truly understand your business, your needs and your ambitions. They're here to make your day-to-day easier – and the futures of both your business, and your customers, that little bit brighter.

Talk to us today to learn more about our services and find out how we can help you to navigate through the ever-changing retail climate with ease and efficiency.



LET'S TALK

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