

CREATING THE OMNICHANNEL EXPERIENCE

By integrating an array of channels, retailers can deliver a seamless experience that improves their relationships with customers.

Executive Summary

E-commerce has revolutionized shopping. Consumers today can research and buy products from home and have a similar experience to what they would have in a store. They even have the added benefit of being able to reach customer service representatives via channels such as email and web chat. The mobile revolution has made shopping even more convenient. Not only can customers have a great shopping experience in a store, but they also can order everything, from clothes to garden supplies, while waiting to board a flight or sitting in a doctor's waiting room.

Although an increasing number of consumers are taking advantage of the multiple channels of shopping, these channels didn't always play together. They have varying features and functionalities, and offer different products, promotions and information. Many shoppers have found it difficult to use a combination of channels to customize a shopping experience that works best for them.

This is where omnichannel retailing comes in. It picks up where the multichannel movement left off. Not only does it provide an array of channels – telephony, video, web, mobile, social media, television, radio, direct mail and in-store tools such as mobile point-of-sale (POS) solutions – but it also integrates those channels so that shoppers can move among them and create a customized, seamless shopping experience. A consumer can research coffee makers online, then go to a store to see them in person. Or, the customer can order a robe online, then return it at a store.

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The omnichannel experience also moves businesses closer to the retail holy grail: insight into customers' shopping preferences and habits. Businesses can use websites, mobile apps, location-based technology, in-store interactive displays and other tools to track what shoppers are looking for and send them promotions targeted to their searches. Retailers can even track when customers come into their stores and how they shop so that they can better manage inventory, store displays and promotions.

By its very nature, omnichannel retailing is complex. It's not only about adding technologies, but also about the nuances needed to integrate tools and policies to create a new retail ecosystem. Many retailers have pieces of an omnichannel system in place, but few make use of all of them, and fewer still have them fully integrated for an optimal customer experience.

A trusted partner can help retailers manage these nuances. A partner can provide the experience and knowledge to help businesses craft a comprehensive omnichannel strategy. It can deliver the end-to-end tools and technical expertise to design, deploy and manage the infrastructure to support that strategy.

For most retailers, this is a brave, new world, but it won't be long before omnichannel retailing is business as usual.

What Is the Omnichannel Experience?

Armed with advice from his podiatrist, a shopper does an online search for running shoes and finds a clearance pair of Asics GT-2000s, which have received excellent customer ratings, on the website of a sporting goods chain. Before he hits "place order," though, he decides to try them on.

When he visits the store and steps into the shoes, they dig into his ankles. So he logs into the store's mobile app to research other shoes, and a coupon for 15 percent off running shoes pops up on his screen. As he searches the app, a sales associate offers assistance. Armed with the store's mobile POS system on her tablet, the associate sees the shopper's cart and search history and reviews marketing information about supportive running shoes. "Try these on," she suggests, handing him a pair of Asics' GEL-Kayano in his size. They fit perfectly, but the color he likes is out of stock. The salesperson searches nearby stores, finds a pair an hour away, orders the shoes with the 15 percent discount, has them shipped to the customer's home and emails him the receipt.

Omnichannel retailing isn't just about offering online, in-store, email and mobile app shopping options; it's about connecting those channels so that customers can seamlessly bounce between them. Under an omnichannel strategy, a company's store, website, mobile app and social media presence all have the same look and feel. They access the same customer information, and they're designed to be used together so that consumers can begin the shopping experience on one channel and switch to another without having to start all over.

The value is undeniable. [Retailers report](#) that omnichannel customers spend 30 percent more than single-channel shoppers. To fully grasp the value of omnichannel, retailers should understand how it works in different channels.

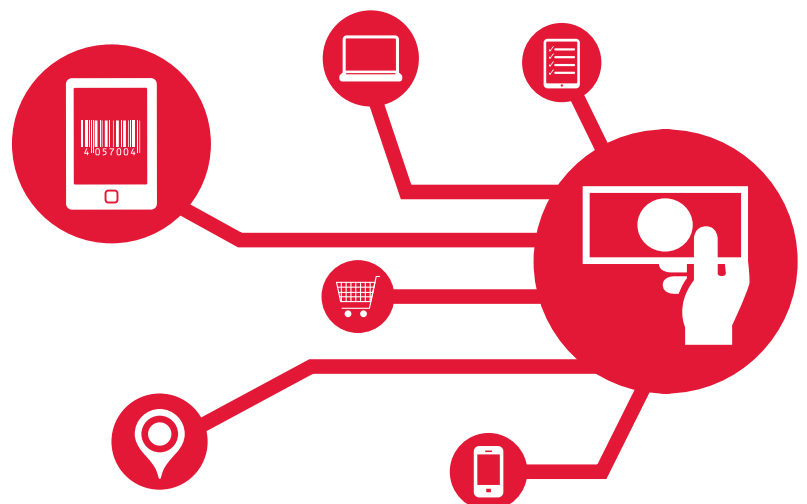
In-Store

Despite the convenience of online shopping, most customers still like to go to stores to try on clothes or ensure that a product is solidly built. Fortunately, store visits can give customers the best of both worlds – the technology to arm them with comprehensive information as well as face-to-face interaction with knowledgeable sales associates.

Thanks to location-based technology, such as beacon, businesses know exactly when customers come into their stores – or even when they're window-shopping outside. They know how long they stay and what parts of the store they visit. Beacon systems use Bluetooth low energy (BLE) – or "Bluetooth smart" – technology to transmit signals to and from mobile apps and a network of beacons within a store. These signals can give retailers information about shoppers, which they can use to push out location-based ads. For instance, if a customer begins looking at headphones, he may get a coupon for 10 percent off audio accessories. Such tactics can help retailers reduce "showrooming" – the practice of visiting stores to interact with products before buying them online.

Another valuable in-store tool is a mobile POS solution, which associates can use to look up customers' shopping history and find product information for them. This is especially important for consumers who have already done their homework online and expect sales associates to add to their knowledge. Associates can also use mobile POS devices to conduct purchases with customers on the spot rather than sending them to stand in line.

Interactive displays can further engage customers in stores. They can send customized product suggestions and promotions based on customers' demographics and purchase history. Even if customers aren't logged into a store's mobile app, displays can use cameras to recognize general characteristics about shoppers, such as gender and approximate age, and offer targeted ads.



Website

Online shoppers can research products, find competitive prices and order merchandise without leaving their couches. Despite these benefits, online shopping represents only 8 percent of purchases. That, however, doesn't mean that customers aren't shopping online; they're just not making their final purchases through that channel. At least [33 percent of in-store purchases](#) involve some online activity, and analysts expect that figure to climb to 60 percent in the next few years.

This illustrates the importance of omnichannel communications. If a sales associate knows that a customer has spent the past two days looking at gaming systems, for example, he can arm himself with information, promotions and data about the customer's purchase history and online searches, then engage the customer in a conversation about gaming systems. This speeds up the process for the customer, because he doesn't have to explain where he is in the research process. It also enhances his experience, because the sales associate has gathered information geared specifically toward his needs.

Mobile

While most customers do the majority of their shopping in stores or online, mobile devices play a big role in connecting those channels. Mobile transforms the multichannel experience into an omnichannel one, letting customers combine available channels into a richer process. With a smartphone or tablet, customers can carry the work they did at home into the store and every place in between.

Retailers are picking up on the importance of mobility. While the majority of smartphone and tablet development budgets have been modest, 80 percent of retailers say they plan to increase their mobile budgets by at least 20 percent this year. In fact, among retailers surveyed for the 2015 State of Retailing Online report (conducted by Forrester Research for Shop.org), about 58 percent say mobile is their top priority, and 45 percent say they're focusing on omnichannel.

Social Media

Websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram let retailers expand their online marketing beyond their own websites and mobile apps. Such ads are becoming ubiquitous, but retailers need to be cautious that they don't go overboard. If a shopper buys

a baby shower gift online, for example, and keeps getting ads for diapers on her Facebook account, the strategy could backfire and make her question the digital footprint she's leaving online.

But social media can play a mutually beneficial role in the omnichannel experience if it's tied to a well-planned strategy. Targeted promotions can convince users to follow a company's social media feed, which can build brand loyalty.

The Benefits of the Omnichannel Experience

Omnichannel retailing is about delivering a shopping experience built around individual customer preferences, but it can also bring tremendous value to retailers. It can help them gather more useful customer data, provide shoppers with better product information, reduce costs, boost revenue, improve customer retention and loyalty, and make it easier to manage inventory.

Improved customer service: As technology makes it easier for businesses to market directly to customers, the expectations and the stakes go up. Today's consumers, millennials in particular, don't want to sit on hold waiting to speak with customer service reps. They don't want to limit their selections to the products on store shelves, or to clip and save coupons. They use technology in all facets of their lives, and shopping is no exception. They pay their electric bills with their tablets, and they track their workouts with their smartphones. So it's natural for them to use a variety of channels to find the perfect product at the best price.

POS solutions can provide sales associates with data about customers and allow them to review information customized for specific shoppers, and mobile POS systems extend these capabilities throughout a store. Rather than being confined behind cash registers, associates can carry tablets that let them look up inventory and conduct transactions with customers from anywhere in the store.

But many retailers struggle with how to communicate appropriately with customers. With targeted marketing reaching customers through email, websites, mobile apps, postal mail, catalogs and in stores, it's easy to cross the line from useful to excessive. Once marketing goes too far and customers feel they're being spammed or that their privacy is being invaded, a business can take a hit in terms of brand loyalty. If companies are too conservative, however, they run the risk of seeming as though they're not interested in engaging with customers. The challenge is figuring out where that line is. The more loyalty customers have to a brand, the more likely they are to embrace omnichannel marketing.

The key is for businesses to understand both customers and their buying habits, and that's exactly the kind of data that omnichannel retailing can deliver. It can help them put controls and policies in place to determine how customers use technology.

Better information: The advantages in communicating available from omnichannel retailing are clear: Businesses can reach out to customers through a variety of channels with information and

76%

The percentage of retail CIOs who say integrating selling channels, including e-commerce, mobile, social, catalog and stores, is a priority for 2015

SOURCE: Forrester Research, "[Retail CIO Agenda 2015: Secure and Innovate](#)", February 2015

offers that are customized specifically to their needs and interests.

But the data gathered through omnichannel marketing can be even more valuable. Retailers can track the types of merchandise customers purchase or even what they look at when they're shopping in stores, online or using mobile apps. That information can arm sales associates with better data about the products customers are interested in and help them suggest additional items.

For instance, if a shopper in the menswear department has a history of purchasing one solid and one patterned tie when he buys shirts, a sales associate can review data on a POS tablet to determine what types of ties to recommend. Or, if that shopper had been looking at shoes online earlier in the week, the associate could lead him to the shoe department before he checks out.

With beacon technology, retailers can see where customers are located within their stores, how they move throughout them and how much time they spend in departments. That information can help them improve store design. If customers always walk in and go to the back left of a store, retailers can put more popular items in the back right corner to get customers to move through more departments. Even if customers don't come inside, retailers can tell if they walk past the store and look in the window, and they can offer discounts to lure them in.

Omnichannel data can also help retailers plan and adjust inventory. If, for instance, there's been an uptick in online shoppers in Denver looking for baseball bats, a store can order a larger supply of bats so that it doesn't run out of stock if those customers wind up in the store.

However, this wealth of information also comes with some challenges. Retailers are struggling to make sense of all the emerging technologies and data sources that can help them understand a consumer's path to purchase. Many are trying to find ways to effectively put that data into action.

They also are still learning which data capturing technologies are the most valuable. Retailers are trying to gain a better understanding through real customer success in implementing data capture technology. They're striving for ways to address the challenges that arise and implement best practices for mitigating those issues.

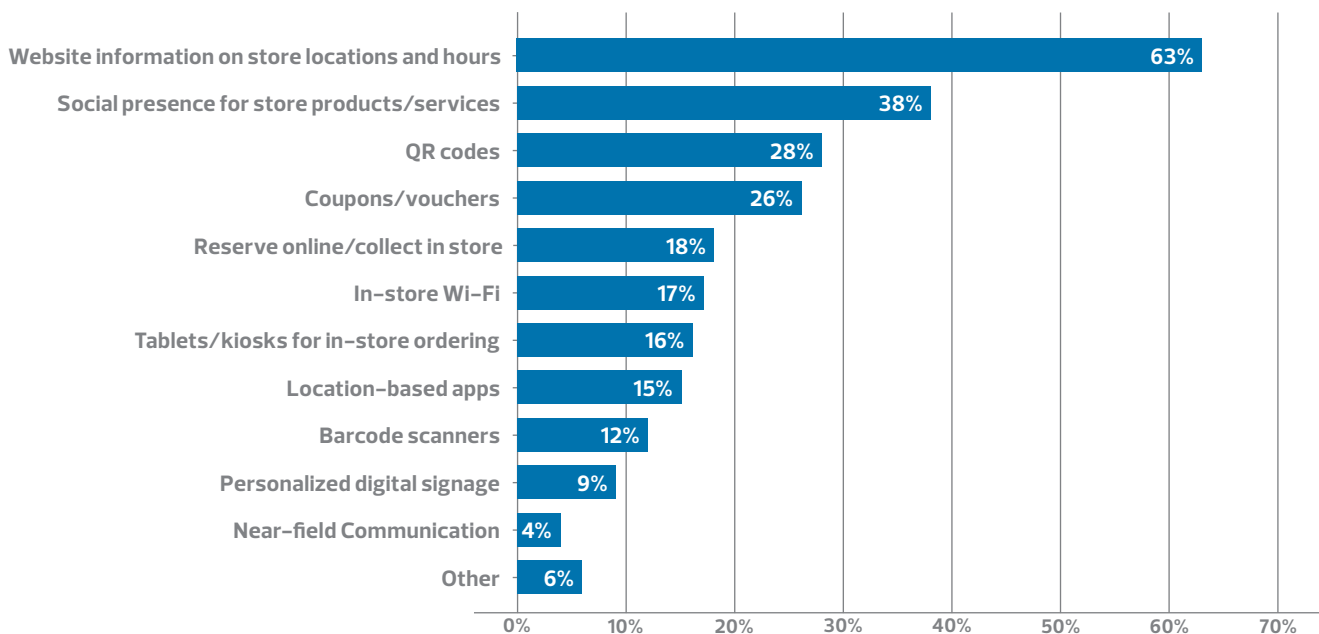
Reduced costs/increased revenue: By analyzing customers' historical data, retailers can get a sense of their shopping patterns and plan accordingly. For instance, if a customer tends to shop online first, then visits stores the following week, the retailer can make sure it has the product the customer looked at online in stock. That means that stores don't need to carry as much inventory. They can use their online, mobile and social media channels as a virtual warehouse, waiting until customers express interest in items before stocking them in the store.

The retailer can also adjust promotions and store signage based on data about customers' shopping preferences and habits. For instance, if a golf bag gets a lot of traffic online but few actual purchases, the retailer can offer discounts or coupons to loyalty-program customers to drive sales.

Businesses can even run analytics to gauge the best price points for products. They can post items online, then lower the prices to

DIGITAL MEETS PHYSICAL

Businesses use a variety of tools to integrate online and in-store experiences:



SOURCE: eMarketer, [The State of Omnichannel Retail](#), September 2013

pinpoint the exact price that drives shoppers to purchase the items.

Customer retention and loyalty: By its very nature, omnichannel retailing is about tuning in to the customer to enhance the shopping experience. When done properly, omnichannel retailing helps customers feel as though their needs are being met, which usually increases customer retention and loyalty. The easier a business makes it for customers to order products, the more likely a customer is to purchase from that business.

Grocery stores are starting to use omnichannel marketing to make it easier for customers to shop. Customers can sign up to receive targeted email discounts. Then, they can shop online or via mobile apps and have the items delivered to their homes. When they shop, they can use mobile apps that save their shopping lists, and as a result, they can receive coupons based on the items they've purchased in the past.

Inventory management: Just as customers use a variety of channels to shop, retailers can combine channels when it comes to delivery. If a customer is traveling and doesn't want to bring an item on a plane, the store can ship it to the person's destination. If it's out of stock, a sales associate or the customer can have items shipped between stores. That means stores don't need to keep large inventories.

Many retailers also are offering a "ship from store" option for online shoppers. This allows a retailer to determine the closest store to the customer, and ship from the store itself instead of shipping from a warehouse. This helps retailers save on shipping costs and shrink delivery times while reducing the need to store inventory.

Supply chain strategy software makes it possible for businesses to move inventory in all sorts of directions. Merchandise can go from website to store, website to consumer or store to consumer. Omnichannel retail even makes it easier for retailers to ship goods directly from the manufacturer or wholesaler to the consumer. That can translate into lower expenses in terms of inventory. In time, it could mean smaller warehouses and, in turn, lower real estate costs or even leaner staffs.

The Elements of the Omnichannel Experience

The goal of omnichannel retailing is to engage with customers using a variety of channels and devices. Therefore, by its very nature, it relies on an assortment of technologies, including unified communications, in-store systems and back-end solutions.

Unified Communications

People use different modes of communications in all areas of their lives — from Skype chats to social media status updates — so it makes sense to use those same tools to reach out to customers. They include:

- **Telephony:** Before the web opened the door to other channels, customer service was driven by telephone calls. Customers still rely on the phone if they have complex customer service issues, so it's important to incorporate data collected from

other channels into the contact center. It gives representatives analytics-based insights that can drive their interactions with customers and help them improve the experience.

- **Online communications:** Channels such as email, web chats, texting and video conferencing can greatly improve customer interactions. Many websites offer a service that allows customers simply to click a button to chat with a customer service representative. In addition to direct communications, reps can exchange files, web pages and articles with visitors who have questions or concerns.
- **Social media:** These online interactions come into play with omnichannel retailing in multiple ways. Often marketing teams use social media for brand management, using Twitter or Facebook to generate buzz about a company. A customer service team, on the other hand, is often responsible for monitoring social media sites to keep tabs on what customers are saying about the company and to respond in real time to issues, concerns or general questions.
- **Customer engagement centers:** Before omnichannel retailing, the various ways of communicating with customers — telephone, email, web chat, video and texting — were disjointed. A customer service representative couldn't tell from the company's customer relationship management system that a customer had emailed three times and visited a store before calling in.

Omnichannel retailing not only offers various ways to communicate, but it gives representatives a complete picture of customers' experiences. It employs analytic software to gather data, such as where a call is coming from and how long a customer has been on the phone. This insight helps representatives — whether they're on the phone, in a store or on the web — to improve the overall customer journey.

In-Store Technologies

Despite the high-tech advances in the retail industry, consumers still generally prefer shopping in person to other channels. Consequently, in-person shopping is increasingly being reimagined to include high-tech tools that enhance the experience.

- **Mobile point-of-sale:** Mobile POS systems offer a variety of advantages. Because they're portable, sales associates can spend more time interacting with customers. They can even be used for line busting, in which sales associates pull customers from long lines and complete their purchases via a mobile device.

Mobile POS integrates customer information to provide an associate with a customer's complete order history. It also can allow the associate to push product information, receipts and coupons from a tablet to the customer's mobile device. Thus, if a shopper isn't ready to make a purchase in-store, the associate can continue to keep in contact while the customer reviews the information from home.

- **Proximity couponing:** As customers walk through stores, retailers can use location-based technology to track where

they're shopping and send coupons to their smartphones for products in those departments. In addition to giving customers added incentive to purchase merchandise, proximity couponing can be helpful by directing customers to other areas of the store for add-on items. For instance, if a customer is shopping for milk, a grocer can send him a coupon for cereal.

- **In-store social interaction:** While technology has transformed retail, many shoppers still want to go into a store and speak with a salesperson before making a purchase. That's a plus for businesses, because associates can suggest add-on items. Technology can enhance these face-to-face interactions. If a customer were to visit an electronics store looking for a TV, an in-store digital display or a mobile app on the shopper's phone could answer questions about TVs or deliver product specifications and a buyer's guide. Meanwhile, a sales associate could offer the customer information without having to go back to a desk or a warehouse. The associate could look up product specs, check inventory across stores and ship the merchandise to a customer's home while they have a conversation.
- **Social-driven displays:** Some third-party developers are enabling social media interaction in stores with interactive cameras built into in-store displays and software that lets customers post photos of themselves with a product. Retailers can also track when customers send social media messages from their stores to see whether they follow through on purchases and to analyze the feedback.
- **Inventory management:** Merging the various channels available to customers and enabling them to shop seamlessly essentially

creates a worldwide warehouse for businesses with multiple locations. Rather than stock extra inventory in each location, businesses can use inventory management software to move merchandise between locations. Inventory management software can also simplify online shopping by allowing customers to return online purchases in stores. The ability to move merchandise between locations can also make in-store shopping easier.

Back End

Businesses need the right back-end platforms in place to enable omnichannel capabilities. Many retailers start with legacy systems and add on new components, but IT workers can face complex challenges as they seek to integrate the systems. Plus, when a legacy platform needs to be upgraded, all of the components must be upgraded and reintegrated, requiring more time and expense.

Businesses that strive for a truly seamless omnichannel experience often install a new customer engagement platform that's already packaged with all the elements. Others at least deploy a solution that allows them to scale up and add components. Because the elements are designed to work together, they function as an ecosystem without requiring integration work. This makes it far easier for retailers to master the nuances of the omnichannel experience.

- **Wireless networking:** The network is the foundation for omnichannel retailing. It's what brings all of the in-store and mobile technologies to life. Vendors such as Meraki and Cisco offer integrated devices that provide wireless Internet access in-store and also have beacon technology and analytics on the back end that can help businesses gather and make sense of customer data. Despite their value, these powerful multifunction devices often don't require a major investment to get off the ground, and they can produce a quick return on investment.
- **Storage:** As businesses collect a growing pool of data from customers, they need a place to store it, and that storage must be accessible to various locations and channels. Because omnichannel commerce is in its infancy, it's important that businesses choose scalable solutions that can evolve with the technology.

Cloud-based storage works well in retail because of the cost, accessibility and scalability. It allows retailers to increase usage around the peak holiday season, then scale down after the new year.

- **Management software:** Another retail challenge during the holidays is store management. With increased staff and inventory, it can be hard to keep all the parts in sync. Management software can help retailers stay on top of everything from staff assignments to store repairs, whether it's during the holiday rush or throughout the year. Armed with tablets or smartphones and management software, staff members can be in constant communication with one another without having to make distracting storewide announcements. Managers can send more cashiers to the registers, call for a clean-up or deploy a maintenance person to repair a broken light fixture. They can

INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

High Fashion Meets High Tech



The high-end fashion industry is a leader when it comes to the omnichannel experience. For instance, when a shopper walks into the Rebecca Minkoff store in Manhattan's SoHo district, he or she is greeted by a connected wall showing Minkoff's latest collection as well as videos of runway shows. The shopper can touch the display — a wall-sized mirror — to have items delivered to a dressing room. The shopper can even order a beverage via a menu on the interactive wall.

When a fitting room is ready, a text message will notify the customer. Shoppers can use the interactive fitting room display to initiate a one-on-one session with a stylist or to adjust the lighting to see the clothing in different settings, such as "morning sun" or "evening stroll."

The customer can add items to a personal profile on a mobile app, and as the system gets to know the types of clothing he or she likes, it can make recommendations based on shopping history. Minkoff's omnichannel system can even send items to be digitally checked out and can email an electronic receipt to a customer.

track inventory and push out assignments to employees so they can get right to work as soon as they arrive.

- **Virtualization:** Retailers can greatly improve their efficiency and management of back-end resources by implementing virtualization. Virtualized servers can handle applications such as customer resource management software, improving the flexibility and scalability of such operations. Virtual desktops also provide a consistent experience for retail users, while allowing IT staff to manage hardware from a central location.

The Importance of Security

The omnichannel experience unites an ever-growing number of channels, devices and players: consumers, retailers, suppliers, distributors and vendors. All these channels, devices and players are accessing a centralized pool of data. This makes omnichannel retailing powerful and pervasive.

While this opens the door to new possibilities, it also exposes businesses to unwanted visitors. More than a quarter of companies surveyed by [the Ponemon Institute](#) in 2014 reported a significant digital security breach in the prior 12 months, at an average cost of \$5.9 million. In addition, Ponemon found that more customers were more likely to terminate their relationship with a company that suffered a data breach.

The potential brand damage from such incidents raises the stakes even higher. To be successful, especially in the omnichannel age, retailers must build strong relationships with consumers. Retailers want shoppers to trust them, and that trust can go a long way in terms of collecting data about consumers and using it to increase sales. Through loyalty programs, businesses have a captive audience to whom they can market as well as poll about new products and services. Happy customers are also one of the best ways to spread the word about a favorite brand.

That's all at risk when customers lose trust in companies. Retail IT leaders grasp the seriousness of the problem. Almost all (97 percent) ranked security as their top priority for 2015, according to a [December 2014 survey by Forrester Research and the National Retail Federation](#). This doesn't mean that they're backing off from omnichannel initiatives, however. In fact, more than three-quarters of respondents identified it as their second priority for the year. The trick is balancing those priorities – protecting the business while innovating.

The challenges and the stakes associated with securing data are too high for many businesses to address alone. A trusted partner can perform a security risk assessment for retailers, test their networks and help them create a customized risk-management plan.

PCI Compliance

On top of the potential for brand damage and hard financial costs from security incidents, businesses face regulatory pressures to keep their systems safe. They need to comply with laws and regulations or risk penalties and lawsuits.

All businesses that accept payment via credit or debit cards must comply with the [Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard](#). The PCI DSS consists of 12 requirements for security management, policies, procedures, network architecture, software design and other critical protective measures aimed at keeping customers' payment card data safe.

To complicate matters further, debit and credit cards in the United States are about to undergo an extreme makeover with the introduction of the new Europay, MasterCard and Visa (EMV) standard. By October 2015, credit card companies will switch from the swipe-and-sign cards in wide use today to cards with smart chips embedded in them that are inserted into a slot or tapped against a scanner. More than [6 million consumers](#) are expected to have the new cards by the end of 2015.

The chips are expected to reduce credit card fraud in stores because they issue unique codes for each transaction, so even if someone were to steal credit card data, the data wouldn't be useful because the transaction code would no longer be valid. The cards are also expected to simplify global transactions since EMV cards are used so widely around the world.

But the standard introduces new challenges for businesses. Since consumers will be carrying these new cards, businesses will need to replace their payment terminals, which is expected to cost a few hundred to several thousand dollars per terminal.

An even bigger potential expense, however, is the shift in liability that will come with the EMV cards. In the past, credit card issuers bore responsibility for the costs of purchases made with stolen cards. After the October 1 deadline, however, retailers that don't upgrade to terminals that can read the EMV cards will be liable for fraudulent charges.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PCI COMPLIANCE



- Take inventory of the company's sensitive data and IT infrastructure.
- Establish a secure network. Monitor and test it regularly.
- Create vulnerability management programs.
- Establish strong access control and security policies.
- Conduct regular security awareness training to educate employees about keeping credit card transactions and sensitive data secure.
- Verify the PCI compliance of third-party service providers.

SOURCE: [PCI Security Standards Council](#)

CDW: An Omnichannel Retail Partner That Gets IT

The omnichannel experience, by its very nature, must be systemic. One of the key differentiators that elevates an experience from multichannel to omnichannel is that unified strategy and seamless integration across channels provide a consistent customer experience. Choosing a partner with the resources to assist throughout an entire project allows businesses to build that consistency from the first step.

CDW is one of the few partners that can provide an end-to-end solution. We offer everything from the core platform needed to implement an omnichannel solution to the mobile POS terminals

in the store. We work with our customers to determine their goals and look at organizational structures to see how best to create an omnichannel strategy.

CDW has strong relationships with all of its partners, which enable us to deliver best-of-breed products. We offer creative solutions that give retailers an advantage over their competitors and ultimately enhance their customers' experiences. Whether it's a mobile solution that allows retail staff to get closer to customers or business analytics that help drive efficiencies in stores, CDW has the resources, expertise and partnerships to bring an entire solution together. Our solution architects and engineers can help implement any solution, and our professional services group can support it in the future.

To learn more about how CDW can deliver a retail omnichannel experience, contact your account manager, call 800.800.4239 or visit CDW.com/retail.



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Intel® powers the immersive retail experiences that help shoppers explore, dream, and connect with the brands they love. From real-time inventory management to customer engagement and personalized marketing, Intel's retail solutions help drive profits and customer loyalty. In-store, online, and on mobile, Intel is inspiring the richer, more captivating shopping engagements that today's connected consumers seek and competitive retailers deliver.

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