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The *unity* factor

eStar chief technology officer **Matt Neale** discusses why true Unified Commerce changes everything.

ACCORDING TO COMSCORE, 40% of purchases are made from cross channel sales, either through searching in-store and purchasing online, or vice versa.

Whilst eCommerce has grown to represent approximately 10% of all sales, 90% percent are still in-store, and with the multiple channels involved in the modern buying journey, there is massive growth opportunity for using the best of all channels to close more sales.

Unified commerce is about transforming the customer journey, it's about removing the friction from shopping by giving the customer the information and support they need to make a buying decision.

There are four major themes emerging across the current retailing landscape:

Increased customer expectation

Customers have increasingly higher expectations of convenience and access to information, products and service.

Customers want their loyalty recognised in tangible ways and they place a high premium on convenience and immediate service, irrespective of location.

Retailers can utilise technology to gain a better view of the customer, their behaviours, and their buying journeys and opportunities to satisfy customer demands.

Very soon, "commerce systems" will begin to supplement and replace the current separate POS and eCommerce systems, directing the future experience of shopping.

When making technology investment decisions, retailers need to focus on advancements that will improve the overall customer experience and remove friction from the buying journey.

Unified commerce is here and it's beyond the omnichannel promise.

An integrated in-store and online experience is no longer a nice-to-have. It is now a matter of survival in the competitive retail landscape.

eCommerce solutions have already leapfrogged POS - with the ability to perform everything that POS terminals do - while providing richer data about customer journeys, faster updates to information, inventory and offer in near real-time, with generally higher levels of reliability thanks to distributed and highly resilient infrastructure.

This opens up the almost limitless potential of integrated data and solution;

- A single view of the customer's interactions and purchases, whether in-store or online – allowing retailers to proactively help their purchase journey.
- A unified system of managing a widely distributed fulfilment network through optimal selection of store, DC and 3PL models.

Overcoming the barriers

Unified commerce is not a goal in itself, instead it is the enabler for placing the customer experience front and center to your strategy. One of the biggest roadblocks is disparate and disconnected technology and systems.

By locating and processing data and transactions on one integrated platform, retailers gain a single source of truth that delivers accurate and up-to-date information, reducing the number of critical connections to inventory, sales management and fulfilment systems that are a necessary and critical point of failure in many retail architectures today.

Make it fit your strategy

Point of Sale (POS) systems are becoming increasingly connected within the overall business system architecture. No longer do the in-store systems stand separate from the online systems.

They must be integrated with, or to your eCommerce platform, providing a seamless customer experience, and to create a competitive advantage - for example when a product is sold to a customer, whether it is in-store, click & collect from any store location, delivered or online only.

The sale should be able to be paid through a multitude of payment methods such as EFTPOS providers, gift cards, layby/deferred payment solutions, or a mixture of them all.

All customer transactions and sales should occur within the same ecosystem, so it becomes irrelevant if a sale has been made online or in-store, or a combination.

Using advanced mobile POS systems, in-store assistants are no longer constrained to being at a counter, but can provide information and complete transactions in a timely manner anywhere.

True unified commerce combines the rich content and user experience of online shopping with the functionality of in-store POS and operator-initiated orders and sales. ∎