Epicor® eBook

The Omnichannel Retailer:

Meeting Your Customers Wherever
and Whenever They Shop

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Omnipresence—Thriving in a Connected World

"It's an exciting time to be a consumer, with unprecedented choices of where and how to shop. And it's a very tough time to be a retailer competing in a rapidly expanding ecosystem, where there are no limits or boundaries to the competition."

Martha Van Gelder, *director of the University of Arizona | Center for Retailing*

- Consumers choose to be connected—90 percent of them use some kind of online to shop and sometimes to complete purchases

- Consumers research online—nearly every consumer now looks up products or services online before heading out to a store, restaurant, or entertainment venue. They also put significant trust in reviews they find online

- Consumers have less and less patience—people want information immediately, and they want products or services quickly, too. They frequently choose the source that can get them what they want the fastest

An Omnichannel Approach

Retailers surveyed count mobile, marketing, and site merchandising among their top digital business initiatives.

Consumer trends have led retailers to count mobile, marketing, and merchandising among their top digital business initiatives. Just think how many brands or businesses you know have added online chat or expedited delivery services in the last year.

To compete in its market, your business will likely need to connect in more ways with consumers, too. In the coming pages, we'll examine six strategies for choosing your communication channels so you can deliver the seamless, omnichannel experience your customers want.

Core channels

You want to create a seamless, omnichannel experience for your customers. Since your business and your market is unique, your choice of channels will vary. Start by taking a look at the modes likely available to you now, and what (if anything) you're doing with that channel now.

Here's a starter list to consider:

- **Your website**—Shoppers rely on smartphones and tablets to access websites, so it's important to utilize mobile-responsive design and incorporate search engine optimization

- **Your eCommerce site**—this could be your only website; a part of a larger site; or a separate, dedicated selling venue

- **Social media**—consider how you can use sharing and social sites like Facebook®, Twitter®, and Instagram® as well as sites dedicated to specific functions like LinkedIn®, Pinterest®, and YouTube®

- **Review sites**—engage with customers through review sites like TripAdvisor® and Yelp® to show you're eager to resolve customers' concerns and encourage happy, loyal customers to keep coming back

- **Email**—email marketing isn't as widely popular as it once was, but it can still make an impact for some demographics and retail niches

- **Blog**—For retailers whose employees are experts in specialized subjects, a blog can be extremely valuable in gaining store traffic and on your website

More channels

- **Voice (telephone)**—many retailers think first of phone as a costly inbound channel. Others see it as an opportunity to differentiate

- **Text on mobile devices**—text is a favorite choice of millennial shoppers, and it's gaining in popularity across age groups

- **Mobile apps**—viable option to smaller businesses as technology providers offer brand-able templates. You can also equip your staff with devices and apps that help them better serve customers

- **Co-op websites (where applicable)**—if you're part of a co-op or chain, they probably have websites and other channels, too

- **In-store experience**—Signage, merchandising, conversation in the aisles, interactions during checkout—are part of your overall customer conversation

- **Loyalty program**—this can cross a number of communication channels (e.g., a mobile app, text promotions, etc.)

If you have a list and good sense of what you're using now, you're ready for the next step.

Before tactics, think strategy

Before you begin crafting an omnichannel strategy, it's essential to know your overall business model and marketing strategy—value proposition, market definition, and approach for customer acquisition and retention.

Consider these examples:
1. A retailer that sells hobby supplies might want to create and share—on its website, in an app, in a blog, or elsewhere—project-focused shopping lists. Deciding to offer lists is a strategic step. Start there, then decide on the right channels

2. Maybe you don't want to sell goods online, but you want to use your site to bring people into the store—especially new customers. Gift registries can be a good strategy here; knowing you want registry capabilities tells you to choose software that will support them

3. A business-to-business (B2B) retailer might want to set up an unusual loyalty program—say, one that offers mini-vacations as rewards to long-term, high-revenue customers. Loyalty software can help, but you want to understand what kind of program you want before you choose software

Make things easier—much easier—for your customers

When considering expanding into a new communication channel—or changing the way you use it—think first, "How can I use this channel to make things easier for my customers?"

Anything you can do to make it easier for customers to find and use information, to put a shopping list together, to locate your store, to share their opinions, to ask questions, or to make purchases will help them be more engaged with your business.

As you consider each interaction your customer has with you—and interactions you want them to have—look for opportunities to drive out complexity and speed up the process. Any improvement you can make—even something as basic as accepting easy-to-use payment methods—will earn customer gratitude and loyalty.

The Staples office supply chain has a program called the "Easy System" that makes it more convenient for customers to make purchases from any device—even from any mobile app. Amazon simplifies making repeat purchases with its "Dash" buttons. Epicor customer and longtime Massachusetts retailer Klem's prominently displays its "Apple® Pay accepted here" message as part of its own "Fast Checkout" program.
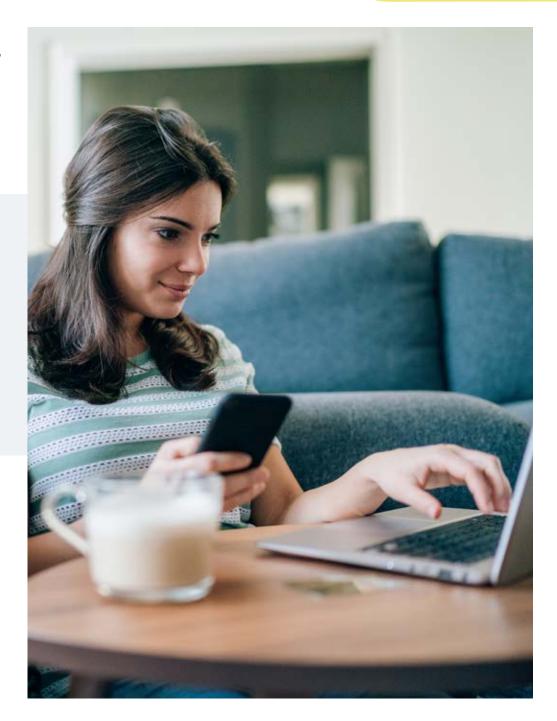
Don't just inform your customers—empower them

Don't make the mistake of producing large new quantities of information just to be present in a communication channel. Instead, think about what's relevant—what will help the consumer to accomplish their current objective, at that time and place.

One Epicor customer, San Francisco's Cole Hardware, implemented the ultimate in relevancy and timeliness, giving customers a 24-hour "How Can We Help You" tool that lets customers submit any question, at any time via text.
Texts are automatically routed to the appropriate store staff, and escalated to the store owner if not answered within 15 minutes. The service has been a big hit with customers—most notably the 35-and-under age group that prefers texting to other ways of communicating.

Here are other ways to empower your customers and drive engagement:

- Join social media groups that are relevant to your market.

- Publish an email newsletter, and let customers specify what they want to read.

- Provide how-to tips in a blog, newsletter or on your website.

- Offer a branded app that people can use in your stores and elsewhere.
  You can even use specialized apps that employees can use to assist customers.

Tap the engagement power of social media

Consumers have demonstrated their passion for social media, and it's essential that your retail business is there with them.

- Establish a consistent brand presence on social media channels and engage.

- Provide relevant content that adds to the conversation and encourages consumers to engage with you. Things on products, on your team, what your business does in the community etc.

- Features like Facebook Live allow you to connect with customers in real time. Offer a discount to participants who post comments to poll questions.

- Provide tips and recomendations, flash salesand news.

- Customer testimonials are great too. It's smart to repost positive reviews and thank customers for their feedback.

- You'll want to add posts, pictures or videos content at least weekly and stay engaged. Respond to posts that are negative so you can turn them into positives.

Surprise—and delight—your customers

Another way to identify and optimize communication channels is to think of ways to surprise your customers. What can you do to evoke that "wow" response?

To get ideas, go back to your business model and market strategy. Are you a price leader? Impress store visitors with a bargain-loaded endcap. Is customer service your big differentiator? Create your own, unique red-carpet treatment, and train your staff to master it.

In the store, there are dozens of ways you can spread delight. Set up a special play area for children. Create eye-catching seasonal decorations. Host holiday "parties" or special events.

Of course, technology can help you delight customers, too. Arm your staff with apps and equipment that help them look up prices, retrieve fast answers, locate a product on the shelves, or demonstrate products in action.

Finally—whatever delight mechanisms you set up, don't be shy about them—share stories about them on social media, in newsletters and blogs, or via whatever channels you've chosen. And get your employees involved to keep them excited about providing the best customer service at all touchpoints.

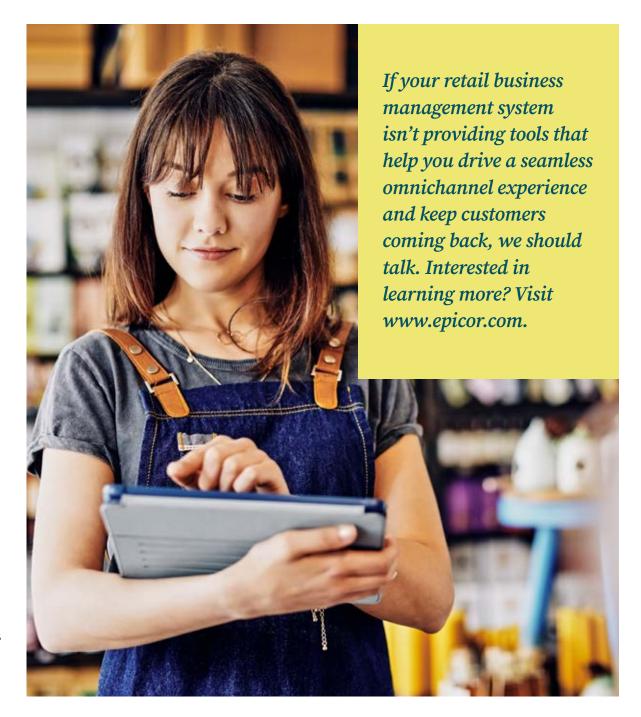# Powerful Tools for a Seamless Customer Experience

Epicor retail management solutions enable retailers to grow and thrive—in part because Epicor is committed to enabling retailers to engage with their customers across a growing array of channels.

Epicor software already features a number of mobile apps that empower retailers to manage inventory, look up prices, complete sales in the aisles, collect competitive pricing intelligence, and complete a wide range of other essential functions —including providing helpful shopping information to customers in the aisles.

Epicor retail solutions also offer a powerful suite of analytics tools to help retailers monitor their success and identify consumer behavior patterns.

Solutions also feature a range of customer engagement tools—loyalty software, eCommerce software, dynamic promotion tools, digital receipts for customers, and state-of-the-industry EMV payment technology—just to name a few. Finally, a growing array of cloud services help businesses take advantage of the latest technology innovations.

Just as important is the Epicor commitment to helping our customers grow. Epicor gives you the tools—and the Epicor retail team is dedicated to helping you use them effectively so your business is positioned to make more money, thrive amid competition, and grow.

If your retail business management system isn't providing tools that help you drive a seamless omnichannel experience and keep customers coming back, we should talk. Interested in learning more? Visit www.epicor.com.

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We're here for the hard-working businesses that keep the world turning. They're the companies who make, deliver, and sell the things we all need. They trust Epicor to help them do business better. Their industries are our industries, and we understand them better than anyone. By working hand-in-hand with our customers, we get to know their business almost as well as they do. Our innovative solution sets are carefully curated to fit their needs, and built to respond flexibly to their fast-changing reality. We accelerate every customer's ambitions, whether to grow and transform, or simply become more productive and effective. That's what makes us the essential partners for the world's most essential businesses.

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