



BY MICHAEL PAUL
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WHY SHOP FRONTS WILL ALWAYS PLAY A ROLE IN RETAIL

THE PACE OF CHANGE IN RETAIL IS STAGGERING, ESPECIALLY ONLINE RETAIL AND ITS INTERSECTION WITH THE IN-STORE EXPERIENCE.



Shopper empowerment is propelling this accelerated change, and a 'play to win' strategy now requires retailers to put themselves in the very best position to service these empowered shoppers.

Today's empowered consumer wants to shop when, where and how they want. They readily shift from channel to channel to make purchasing decisions and also freely move between devices (PC, smartphone and tablet). Some are influenced by social media, while some embrace apps and many others rely on retailer premises. Boundaries between channels are now blurred and the ease of shifting between them has been accelerated by the mass-market adoption of smartphone usage.

Retailers therefore must make shopping experiences cohesive, seamless and essentially interchangeable between channels if they are to succeed.

Shopper expectations about physical stores are also continuing to evolve. Getting the basics right when it comes to in-store customer service experience has never been more critical, and, when done extremely well, can provide a major competitive advantage. So much so that pure online retailers are now opening up physical storefronts – even Amazon is doing it.

While physical retail spaces offer convenience, multisensory consumer experiences (the desire to see,

touch and feel products), personal consultancy and a friendly face on the other side of the counter, retail success today now requires in-store experiences to be complemented by online channels. Resisting this trend and taking a position of competing with other channels is pointless – the empowered shopper needs to be provided with more choice so they can choose the right service at the right time.

That's why travel agencies like Flight Centre are never short of business – they give customers the best of both worlds with in-store and online solutions.

The principle of how you send a parcel has not really changed in the past 20 years. However, what has changed significantly is the customer interface – the way we need to engage and interact with the customer and the way they want to interact with us. Consequently, we have invested (and are continuing to invest) heavily in the development of customer facing technology to create user-friendly service platforms.

We're very much in the age of the empowered customer. The big winners in the future will be those companies that provide more choice and let their customers choose between higher-cost full service in-store solutions and online self-service solutions (as circumstances dictate), all under one brand. ¹⁴



GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT WHEN IT COMES TO IN-STORE CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERIENCE HAS NEVER BEEN MORE CRITICAL, AND WHEN DONE EXTREMELY WELL CAN PROVIDE A MAJOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE.

Michael Paul is the founder and CEO of packing and freight delivery company Pack & Send, established in Australia in 1993 and now expanded to the UK and New Zealand. The company has evolved from a single retail outlet to multiple sales channels that include retail service centres, logistics fulfilment centres, call centre, online courier booking systems and online retail integrations.