

7 Ways to Future-Proof Your Retail Store



Francesca Nicasio

RETAIL SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

7 WAYS TO FUTURE-PROOF YOUR RETAIL STORE

Francesca Nicasio

BROUGHT TO YOU BY VEND

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Introduction

“Nooooo!” I exclaimed. “It still won’t turn on!”

It was Sunday morning, and there I was, holding my dead iPhone in my hands. I had dropped it in the toilet the day before, and my attempt to salvage it (i.e. putting it in rice for 24 hours) didn’t work.

Suffice it to say, I was frustrated. I was supposed to be on the road the next day, and I needed a phone, stat.

So I made a Genius Bar appointment on Apple’s website, then drove to the nearest store a couple of hours later. When I arrived, I was taken aback at how busy the store was. “I’m going to be here forever,” I grumbled.

But, to my surprise, there was hardly any wait. Moments later, I was approached by a staff member who checked my appointment using his iPad, and we immediately got down to talking about what I needed.

He listened as I told him what happened, and when I was done, I braced myself for the fate of my phone. How long would I have to wait to get it fixed? How much was it going to cost?

I waited for the bad news, but instead, the Genius smiled reassuringly, and said that there was a faster and less expensive option. I could just “trade in” my broken phone and get a new one for a fraction of the cost.

“That’s it?” I asked, my panic simmering down.

“That’s it.”

“How long is that going to take?”

“I’ll do it for you right now,” he said. He disappeared into the back and not two minutes later came back with a new phone. I was good to go in no time.

On my way out, I passed a shelf of iPhone cases, and decided to buy one. There happened to be another associate a few feet away, and he not only rang me up on the spot with his handheld POS, but he also installed the case for me right then and there.

I walked out of the Apple Store feeling relieved and blown away. “This,” I thought to myself, “is what every in-store experience should be like.”

Why did I bring up this story? Two reasons. The first is to remind you to never put your phone in your jeans’ back pocket when you’re in the bathroom. Secondly, I wanted to share a story that depicted what modern retailing looks like.

The world of retail is going through some huge changes. Cloud computing, mobile, and big data have changed the retail game, and merchants need to adapt to the new rules and take advantage of non-traditional tools in order to win.

And that is exactly what this book is for. Think of *Retail Survival of the Fittest* as a guide that’ll help you understand how to thrive in the new age of retail. It will teach you how to adapt to the contemporary retail playing field by shedding light on tools and strategies you can use to keep up with customers, increase profits, and be a better retailer overall.

It’ll also introduce you to other retailers and give you a peek into what they’re doing to succeed in this modern landscape. And by the time you get to the end, my hope is you will have a better idea of how you can take your store to the next level.

So if you’re ready to do all that, turn the page, and let’s get you started on the path to retail success.

Chapter 1

Recognizing that retail isn't what it used to be

*It's not physical or digital; it's physical with digital.
- A.T. Kearney's Omnichannel Shopping Preferences Study.*



Let's kick things off by getting one thing out of the way first: Brick-and-mortar retail is alive and well.

Don't believe the headlines proclaiming its death, and pay no attention to the slideshows of deserted malls perpetuated in the blogosphere. Brick-and-mortar shopping isn't dead—it's evolving.

Consider the numbers:

According [A.T. Kearney's Omnichannel Shopping Preferences Study](#),

90% of all retail sales are transacted in stores and 95% of all retail sales are captured by retailers with a brick-and-mortar presence.

The report, which surveyed 2,500 US consumers across multiple demographic groups (teens, Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers, and seniors) also found that “two-thirds of customers purchasing online use a physical store before or after the transaction.”

These stats tell us that many consumers are still big fans of brick-and-mortar retail. That being said though, it doesn't mean that merchants should focus on this channel alone. See, while offline stores are still very much a part of people's shopping journey, other channels and devices are also playing important roles in how customers are discovering, researching, and purchasing products.

Take mobile, for instance. [Nielsen and Google's Mobile Path to Purchase study](#) estimates that consumers spend more than 15 hours a week researching on their smartphone. The study found that “93% of people who used mobile to research go on to complete a purchase.” Eighty-two percent of converted consumers complete their purchase in-store, while only 45% and 17% purchased online and via mobile phone respectively.

Clearly, mobile is playing an increasingly large role in people's path to purchase. And while not a lot of people are using their phones to *buy*, they're certainly using their phones to *shop*. It's also worth noting that a lot of mobile users eventually head to brick-and-mortar stores to complete their purchases.

But what about the web? *Are online stores really killing brick-and-mortar?*

Answer: Like most things, it depends.

Brick-and-mortar stores that don't have an online presence and aren't doing anything to bridge the gap between offline and digital channels have every reason to be threatened by the web. Make no mistake, most consumers spend a lot of time on the Internet. They use it to search for products, read reviews, and find stores, so if you aren't online, you're essentially invisible.

On the other hand, retailers that do have an online presence and are finding ways to deliver experiences across multiple channels, should see the web not as a threat, but an ally. Yes, some consumers are turning to e-commerce to complete purchases, but studies have shown that more people actually end up buying offline.

In fact, [Forrester estimates](#) that webrooming—the practice of looking at items online only to buy them at a physical location—will result in \$1.8 trillion in retail sales by the year 2017. Meanwhile, online sales are predicted to reach only \$370 billion in the same time frame.

In addition, people who buy online prefer to pick up and return items offline. In a [comScore survey commissioned by UPS](#), it was found that 44% of online shoppers “would be likely to shop with a retailer if they could buy online and pick up in the store.” The study also uncovered that 62% of respondents would like to buy merchandise online and be able to return products in-store.

This is a big boon for brick-and-mortar merchants. As A.T. Kearney put it, “For online pure-plays, returns are dead-net cost; for a brick-and-mortar store, a return is a potential new sale.” The same goes for in-store pickups. If physical merchants play their cards right, they can use those offline trips to drive sales and increase customer satisfaction.

Smart retailers are aware of this. They know that brick-and-mortar is an essential part of the shopping journey and it gives merchants unparalleled opportunities to connect with consumers. That's why an increasing number of e-commerce merchants are setting up shop offline. Amazon for example, is investing in pop-up stores while Bonobos is opening up physical Guideshops for customers who want to try on their clothes. Meanwhile, former online pure-play

Nasty Gal opened its first store in New York and is planning to debut another one in Los Angeles.

And that's just the beginning. As shoppers seek more omnichannel experiences, expect more e-commerce businesses to adopt the bricks-and-clicks route in the near future.

Bottom Line: Enhance brick-and-mortar while increasing your presence in other channels

Brick-and-mortar stores that want to achieve retail success must embrace multiple channels and devices and use them to connect with consumers at every part of their path to purchase.

If they're shopping offline, make sure you give them a compelling experience that they can't find on any website or device. If they're on their smartphone, see to it that they can easily find your location or browse products without any "fat-finger" issues. And if they're shopping online, give them multiple shipping or pickup options so they can get their hands on their items, on their own terms.

In other words,

you should be there for your customers no matter where they are or what device they're using, and you should provide an excellent experience as your shoppers switch from one channel to the next.

Don't worry if you don't know how to pull this off yet. In the succeeding chapters, we'll talk about how you can do all that through various examples and action steps.

Action steps:

1. Evaluate your online, offline, and mobile strategies. Have you established an online and mobile presence? Are you enabling customers to research, shop, and pay for items across various channels? Do you have an online store, and if so, does it integrate with your offline shop?

2. Brainstorm ways on how you can be an omnichannel retailer. Maybe you should get your online and offline stores “talking” to each other. Or, perhaps you can start offering online-to-offline services.

3. Read the rest of this book for ideas and examples that you can apply in your own business.

Chapter 2

Running an omnichannel store

It's all about a seamless, frictionless experience for our customer, so that ability to make the payment online, go into the store, scan the product, get the product, be out of the store in minutes, is very important.

- Fred Argir, Chief Digital Officer, Toys “R” Us



The modern consumer uses a variety of channels to shop. It's not uncommon for a customer to research products online, compare prices on their phone, test out the merchandise in person, and eventually complete the purchase on an e-commerce site.

Shoppers these days are no longer using just one channel, and neither should you. In order to keep up, retailers must find ways to serve customers across all these channels and devices.

This can be done by offering online to offline services such as click-and-collect, in-store pickups/returns and more.

Need more ideas? Some examples of retailers with winning omnichannel strategies include:

Oasis

This UK-based apparel store has certainly mastered the art of omnichannel order fulfillment. The retailer arms its associates with iPads so they can assist shoppers and provide information on item size, color, and availability from anywhere in the store. If a particular item isn't available in-store, the staff can order it online on the customer's behalf.

Online shoppers on the other hand, can enjoy the same convenience through Oasis' "Seek and Send" service. If a product is out of stock online, Oasis can scour its brick-and-mortar stores for that item, and ship it to the customer.

Nike

The brand lets people contact support over the phone, via email, or using live chat. You can even schedule an appointment and have them call you.

Nike also has a dedicated social account for customer service. Social-savvy users can reach out to the brand by touching base with @NikeSupport, its official Twitter account that's on call seven days a week.

Nike is doing such an awesome job in leveraging Twitter for customer service that according to [Simply Measured](#), "Nike has an average response time of 2.8 hours, well below the Interbrand 100 average of 5.4 hours. 55% of the time @NikeSupport is able to

respond within 30 minutes, and an additional 13% of responses are made within the hour.”

Talk about dedication!

Aim to provide the same multi-channel customer service for your store. If it's not possible to provide round-the-clock support, then at least display your customer service hours on your help page to let people know the best time to reach you.

Walmart

It's easy to see why Walmart won the Mobile App of the Year & Mobile Retailer of the Year awards by Mobile Commerce Daily. It has an array of features that make it convenient for people to shop no matter where they are or what device they're using.

For instance, it lets users create shopping lists by typing, speaking or scanning items using the app. Shoppers can also check product availability before heading to the store, and they can track costs as they update their list.

In addition, the app has a nifty “Store Mode” function that enables users to learn the price of any product using its built-in scanner. The feature also lets them see their local store's ads, new arrivals, rollbacks, and more.

Its e-commerce site provides convenient options as well. Shoppers can choose to have their items shipped to their house, or they can pick up their purchases at their nearest FedEx or Walmart branch.

Amazon

The e-commerce giant is taking huge strides towards omnichannel retail by giving people the ability to browse and shop from any channel.

For instance, offline users who want to add items to their shopping carts can do so using Amazon Flow—a mobile app feature that lets people fill up their online shopping carts by scanning products (snacks, books, supplies etc.) using their smartphone.

Amazon also has various pop-up stores where shoppers can test and see products in person—thus bridging the gap between e-commerce and brick-and-mortar.

Finally, the retailer recently introduced Amazon Locker, a service that lets people pick up their orders from a self-service facility. Ideal for shoppers who don't want to sit at home waiting for the delivery guy, this is a great example of enabling people to get their hands on products on their own terms.

CVS

When it comes to managing and refilling prescriptions, CVS has got all the important channels covered. These days, customers don't have to personally go to a CVS branch to drop off their prescription. They can either call it in or have their doctor's office send it to the pharmacy.

Managing refills across multiple channels is also a breeze. CVS members can refill their prescriptions in person, or they can simply scan their prescription bottle's barcode using the company's official app. Some CVS locations now have drive-thru facilities, giving people the added convenience of picking up their prescriptions right from their vehicle.

And if customers can't make it to the store, they can have their purchases shipped to their home instead.

What can you do?

As the above-examples illustrate, there are plenty of ways to be omnichannel.

The key to figuring out what's the best strategy for your store is to determine the key products and services that your customers need, and offering them on other channels and devices.

A cafe, for example can start providing online or mobile ordering so customers can quickly pick up their orders without waiting in

line. Or, a store that sells baby products can allow shoppers to manage their baby shower gift registries online as well as through their mobile site or app.

Action Step:

1. Find ways to merge online and offline channels in your store. You can begin by providing in-store pickups and returns, for one. Perhaps you can start letting shoppers check if a product is available in-store using your website. Or, if you don't have online customer support yet (i.e. live chat, social media), consider setting up the systems that would let your customers reach you however they want.

Chapter 3

Taking the guesswork out of retail

When the time comes to expand your retail business, how will you know? Some shop owners decide purely on gut feeling.

Some people decide based on excess cash-flow. Forward-thinking retailers decide because they see the signs in the data.

- Vaughan Rowsell, Vend Founder and CEO



Take the guesswork out of retail by using customer data to make business decisions. What kinds of promotions should you introduce? Which products do your shoppers love the most? What are your store's peak hours?

All these questions can be answered easily by looking at your store's data. Take Covet, one of Vend's fabulous customers in San Francisco. According to Adrienne Wiley, owner and operator of Covet, simply paying attention to her shop's analytics and reports helped her business grow tremendously.

"At first I was just using it basically for ringing up sales...but once I finally started using all of the analytics... it was wonderful! I

actually determined what I should be stocking more of in my new location based on sales by category and then fine-tuned the hours by looking at the sales by hour.

“So start taking advantage of the data right away, because it can really help grow your business.”

Gathering sales and inventory data however, is only the beginning.

Thanks to advancements in brick-and-mortar analytics, offline retailers now have the capabilities to track in-store movements and customer behavior—similar to how e-commerce merchants would.

Brick and mortar analytics can be implemented using a number of solutions. The most popular ones include:

Mobile

Each mobile device equipped with Wi-Fi or Bluetooth broadcasts a unique code called a MAC address that can be logged by sensors whenever the phone’s Wi-Fi or Bluetooth capability is turned on. This code lets retailers track the movements of customers within their store, shedding light on tons of data points such as the amount of time spent in each aisle, where shoppers go after viewing a particular item, customer wait time at checkout, and more. And since each code is unique, sensors can tell if someone is a repeat customer.

It’s important to note that in-store analytics technology doesn’t collect personal information. As the [Future of Privacy Forum](#) put it, “A MAC address is simply a 12-character string of letters and numbers; it doesn’t contain personal information like your name, email address, or phone number.”

According to the [New York Times](#), the practice is being tested by “all sorts of retailers,” from national chains such as Family Dollar, Cabela’s and Mothercare, and specialty shops such as Benetton and Warby Parker.

Having all those insights enables retailers to make significant improvements to their stores. It could tell them where to assign their staff, how to arrange products, how to position retail equipment such as their POS hardware, and more.

In the same way that sites like Amazon optimize their web pages and deliver customized recommendations based on visitor behavior, offline merchants can modify store layout and provide personalized experiences using foot traffic data.

People Counters

A simple, yet highly effective way to implement in-store analytics, counters are also used by retailers to measure foot traffic.

In a [case study](#) about Godiva, ShopperTrak, a retail technology company, discussed how people counters helped increase the chocolatier's transactions and conversion rates.

One of the challenges that Godiva faced was inconsistency in its traffic and conversion numbers. Since some of its stores are situated in tourist areas while others are located in financial districts, its traffic flow and conversion rates weren't the same for all its branches.

To address this, the chocolatier analyzed traffic trends for each individual branch. Doing so gave Godiva actionable insights and it implemented staffing and marketing strategies based on the data it found. ShopperTrak's foot traffic data enabled the retailer to "plan staff rotas to ensure that there is always a healthy associate to customer ratio and to place the best staff on the shop floor at peak traffic times."

The insights also helped the brand measure the impact of its window displays, and it was able to determine which window merchandising strategies brought in more customers.

As a result, the number of in-store transactions went up by 10% and conversion rates increased from 24% to 26.5% in six weeks.

Online Coupons

Retailers can also use their promotions to gain more insights about in-store traffic. By tracking the coupons redeemed at checkout, merchants can see which offers are driving traffic to their location.

St Laurent Shopping Centre, one of Canada's largest malls, did just that. With the help of analytics company SourceMetrics, the shopping center created a social media contest to drive people to its location. According to the company's [case study](#), the promotion resulted in 869 clicks and enticed 263 people to head to the mall.

And since SourceMetrics tracks the numbers and gives merchants sales and conversion insights for each individual store, city, and time of day, St Laurent was able to determine which social sites were driving the most traffic and what times they needed to push the content.

So, how can you put data to work in your store?

Start by being more aware of your sales and inventory. Like what Covet is doing, look into your store's analytics and POS data and determine your top sellers, most profitable items, peak hours, etc.

And if you want to move on to more sophisticated uses of data, look into in-store analytics solutions.

To shed light on this matter, we sought the help of Software Advice, a company that researches retail technology. They published a report by tech expert David Strom about how retailers are using mobile-enabled customer analytics.

We asked David about the tools retailers can use to leverage in-store analytics, and according to him, some of the vendors in the space include:

Indoor Tracking Technologies Vendors

Vendor	URL	Notable Features
Aisle Labs	aislelabs.com	Shopper demographics
Aisle411	aisle411.com	User navigate store maps
Brickstream	brickstream.com	3D Tracking
Euclid Analytics	euclidanalytics.com	Rich APIs
Gozio	gozio.me	User navigate store maps
Iinside	iinside.com	Precise locations on existing Wi-Fi hardware
inMarket CheckPoints	Inmarket.com	Pay-for-performance apps
Measurence	measurence.com	Analytic tools
Mexia Interactive	mexia.ca	Precise locations on their hardware
Navizon	navizon.com	REST API access
NEON	trxsystems.com	Underground support
Qualcomm Gimbal	Gimbal.com	Personal content delivery
Radius Networks	radiusNetworks.com	Apple iBeacon support
Retail Next	retailnext.com	Wide software tools including POS integration
Shopper Trak	shoppertrak.com	Managed SaaS service
Solomo Technology	solomotechnology.com	Real-time map display
Swarm	swarm-mobile.com	POS integration
Turnstyle Solutions	getturnstyle.com	Push and SMS messaging
Walkbase	walkbase.com	A/B testing
YFind	ruckuswireless.com	Precise locations and Wi-Fi integration

(You can check out his original table [here](#).)

How do you know which analytics vendor is right for you? Consider the type of store and the kinds of information you need to collect. Also be sure to look into data sources you already have. For instance, if you collect customer data from your Wi-Fi network, surveillance tools, or POS system, find a solution that integrates with those existing tools to make it easier to plug in the information.

Do note that some solutions are more advanced than others. According to David, some can monitor movements up to a couple of feet, while others can track a shopper within ten or 20 feet. There are also others that only collect data on a general store level. Determine the types of location data you need and see to it that your solution can deliver to that precision.

Do your research, see what similar retailers are using, and test out the solutions in your store.

As for the kinds of data you should collect, David recommends that retailers pay attention to the following:

1. Dwell time in the store
2. Average shop times across a particular time of day or day of the year
3. Parts of the store that customers visit the most and the least
4. Where customers live or work in relation to the store
5. Cross-store data comparisons

What should you do with all that information? The first step to turning data into something useful is to analyze what those numbers mean and figure out how you can improve. For example, if the numbers tell you that checkout time in your store is longer than the industry average, use that information and find ways to streamline the checkout process.

Or, say you know which parts of your store are getting the most and least traffic. The next step is to figure out why certain store sections

are getting more visits than others. Is it because of the products in those departments or is it their positioning in the shop?

And don't forget to consider factors outside your store, such as the weather, environment, time of year, etc. As David put it:

Retailers need to understand what the above metrics mean and how to explain the differences, such as was there bad weather one day that increased or decreased the dwell time? Did some other store nearby run a major sale that brought people into the mall or the block? Did a special advertisement bring more customers in for a particular reason? Did a store layout encourage or discourage shoppers from going to a particular place?

Using data to personalize customer experiences

Aside from giving you the intel to improve your store, data tools can also help you personalize each shopper's experience. Our online friends have been doing it for years. E-tailers know when someone is a returning visitor or a new customer, what products they purchased in the past, as well as which items would likely interest them. They could then use this information to serve up customized recommendations and offers.

Fortunately, offline retailers can do this as well. By using beacons—those cool little devices that can “talk” to your customers' smartphones—you'll be able to send tailored messages based on their previous behavior and location in your shop.

For instance, if someone is a returning customer, your store's beacons could greet them with a “Welcome back!” message. Or, if they're browsing a particular department, you can send them tailored notifications on the offers you have for relevant products.

Case in point: Tarrytown Pharmacy. This small pharmacy in Austin, TX recently partnered up with iBeacon solutions provider Shelfbucks to test out the technology in its store. Users can download the Shelfbucks app, opt-in for the service, and receive tailored offers depending on what aisle they're in. That way, if the

shopper is browsing, say, the vitamins aisle, they might receive a special offer for multivitamins or supplements.

Action steps:

1. Ask yourself: How are you tracking your sales and inventory? Are you satisfied with the kinds of data you can get your hands on? If not, find other data and reporting tools that can give you richer information.

2. Are you collecting intel on your customers? Can you track their behavior, purchase history, and preferences? If not, you should start looking into solutions that would allow you to do so. We've provided a handy list of in-store analytics vendors in this chapter. Check them out and see if you can use any of them in your store.

Chapter 4

Increasing profits the modern way

If your profit margins aren't rising, chances are your company isn't thriving.

- Doug Hall, Founder of Eureka! Ranch



Brick-and-mortar stores have higher overheads compared to other retail channels, so optimizing your margins is essential to staying profitable. Fortunately, this task has become immensely easier thanks to the rise of data and reporting tools, as well as the emergence of apps that can automate various retail tasks.

The days of filling out spreadsheets, or making lengthy calculations just to determine how much stock to order or how you should price your products are long gone—or at least they should be.

By using certain retail solutions, merchants can not only automate several aspects of their business, but they can also get their hands on data and insights that are invaluable in decision-making.

Any business that wants to compete in the modern retail realm must learn to take advantage of these tools and use them to craft better, more profitable strategies.

And that's exactly what the following stores did:

T-We Tea

A San Francisco-based tea retailer, T-We Tea sells both blended teas and tea accessories. They used [Vend](#) to analyze their inventory, and figured out what their top-sellers are as well as how much each item cost.

Upon viewing their reports, T-We Tea realized that while sales were increasing, their customers were purchasing more of their low-margin items (like accessories) instead of their house-made teas.

To address this, T-We Tea bundled up their top-sellers with their high-margin merchandise and sold those bundles at a discounted rate. This move, along with other tweaks, enabled the business to increase revenues by 300%.

BikeBerry.com

Another effective way to improve your margins is by offering tailored discounts. Remember that not all customers are wired the same way. Some people may need a 20% off incentive to convert, while others don't really need a lot of convincing.

Instead of killing your profits with large, one-size-fits-all offers, identify how big of a discount is necessary to convert each customer.

Case in point: Online bicycle retailer BikeBerry.com. The e-tailer analyzed customer behavior using big data company Retention Science and gathered intel on their customers' past purchases, browsing history, and more. This allowed them to get to know their customers and figure out the most cost-effective way to convert each one.

They then created a series of email campaigns with 5 different discount offers tailored to each individual. Customers received one of the following offers in their inbox: Free Shipping (which is huge because shipping costs can run high for bikes and other accessories), 5% off, 10% off, 15% off, and \$30 off new products.

The campaigns ran for two months and within that period, BikeBerry not only increased sales, but they were able to widen their profit margins by not offering incentives that are too big to customers who would convert at a lower threshold.

The magic of automation

Increasing your profit margins isn't just about tweaking your prices or discounts; you can also widen margins by reducing expenses—most notably your operating expenses.

One of the simplest ways to do this is to find repetitive tasks in your business—such as data entry or managing schedules—and see if you can automate them.

For example, if you exert quite a bit of effort manually coordinating staff schedules, making sense of time sheets and tracking employees, you can opt for an automated workforce management solution to take care of all that grunt work for you.

Deputy, a cloud-based employee management app, is an example of such a solution. It enables employees to easily pick up shifts, switch schedules, and request time off using the app itself, and retailers can monitor everything from one central location, saving them tons of time and effort.

Or let's say you spend a lot of time transferring register closures and account sales from your POS to your accounting software. Instead of devoting too much energy on this task, automate it by getting the two systems to “talk” to each by either adopting solutions that can easily be linked (ex: Vend + Xero), or by using cloud app integration services such as Stitch or Zapier.

The above situations are just a few examples of how you can automate certain processes in your business. Keep finding more of these tasks and identify solutions that can take them off your hands. Time is money, after all, and if you can spend less time doing menial tasks, you can reduce your operating expenses, widen your margins, and free up resources better spent on growing your business.

Action steps:

1. Go through your sales and inventory data and identify your top sellers, high-profit products, and low-margin items.
2. Brainstorm ways to maximize your sales and margins. Like T-We Tea, you could start bundling high-margin (but slow moving) products with your top sellers. Or, like BikeBerry, you could start personalizing discounts to make sure that you aren't slashing your prices too much.
3. Identify any menial or repetitive tasks in your business and then find tools and apps that can automate them.

Chapter 5

Using mobile to drive in-store traffic

*Mobiles are the devices where the high street fights back.
- Mandeep Singh, CEO and co-founder of StreetHub*



According to a report by [Internet Retailer](#), “nearly two-thirds of smartphone owners in Q2 2013 used a mobile web browser to research product features (64%), and more than half used a mobile web browser to find a store location (59%) and to find coupons and deals (53%).”

Clearly, consumers nowadays are turning to their trusty smartphones to assist them in every step of the shopping process, which is why it's more important than ever to establish a strong presence in the small screen.

Here are a few steps to enable you to do just that:

Get listed on search engines and social networks

Search Engines

The first step to increasing your mobile visibility is to put your business on the map. Google's map, that is. Doing so will allow customers to find you whenever they type in your business name or a relevant keyword (i.e. coffee shop, winery, etc.) into Google.

Head to [Google's Places for Business page](#) then type in the necessary information about your business. Go beyond the basics (i.e. name, address, phone) and provide as many details as you can, including your hours of operation, methods of payment that you accept, available parking, etc. Also add some photos of your location and products. The more details you can provide, the more credible you'll appear.

The next step is verifying your ownership. Google will send you a postcard containing a PIN number that you can enter on the verification page. Once this is done, you're good to go.

Bing offers a similar service at [BingPlaces.com](#). Its process is similar to that of Google's, but you will need to create a Microsoft account in order to get listed.

Yelp

Yelp can add tremendous visibility for your business both on the web and on mobile (its app was used on over 11 million unique mobile devices in the third quarter of 2013). In addition, having your business listed on the site enables you to track and respond to reviews, create deals, and get to know your customers more.

You can also incentivize Yelp users to check-in and make purchases.

Case in point: DK's Donuts & Bakery in Santa Monica. The bakery offers freebie deals to customers who make a purchase and check-in via Yelp. Doing so encourages sales while putting the business in front of their customers' friends at the same time.

To start Yelping, go to the [Yelp for Business Owners Page](#) and claim your business. You can do this by searching for your company on [Yelp's Find Your Business](#) page, and hitting the "Claim" button beside for your business name.

If your company isn't listed on the site yet, you'll need to create an account and fill out the necessary forms for your business.

Foursquare

Having a Foursquare listing enables customers to check-in to your location and broadcast their activities to their friends. It also lets them leave comments and tips for other users.

Get started by creating a Foursquare account. Like Yelp, you can use the site's [business search tool](#) to see if your company is already in its database. If your business isn't listed, you can create a listing on foursquare.com/add_venue.

Once you have found or created your listing, click the "claim here" button then follow the steps to verify ownership. For a one-time \$1 fee, Foursquare lets you verify your listing via phone, so you can start managing your account immediately. Alternatively, you can opt for postal mail verification, which is free, but it can take up to a month before you receive your claim code.

Partner up with shopping apps

Customers are also using their mobile devices to look up product information and deals. If you're offering promotions or just want to put your product information out there, consider partnering with shopping apps to have your store show up on shoppers' mobile devices.

For instance, [Red Laser](#), one of the top mobile apps for scanning product barcodes and comparing prices, lets merchants submit their data feeds so they can get their product information and pricing available through the app.

Meanwhile, [Yowza!!](#), a mobile couponing app which surfaces deals based on the user's location, also has some merchant services

that allow businesses to upload coupons so that shoppers in the area can find their deals. Yowza!! offers a free account that lets companies publish one coupon per store a month. It also has a \$49 (\$19 for a limited time) standard plan for three coupons a month, and a \$99 (\$39 for a limited time) plan for unlimited coupons.

Optimize your site for mobile

So you've set up your listings and mobile coupons. What happens when mobile users actually click-through your site to learn more about your business? If shoppers are greeted with a messy website that's difficult to navigate on their phone, you instantly reduce the chances of getting them through your doors.

Prevent this by designing a user-friendly and responsive mobile website. Make the text and images large enough so that they're fat finger-proof and make sure that your contact information is easy to find. Also remember that you don't have to cram all the information and pages from your full site into the mobile version. Only include the most important and frequently visited pages and just add an option to view your entire website so users can access it if they need to.

To make things easier, look into services such as [Mobify](#) or [Mofuse](#) to create a mobile version of your existing website.

Using mobile to target local customers

Research has [shown](#) that “79 percent of smartphone owners and 81 percent of tablet owners use their devices to search for information on *local businesses*”. (Emphasis added.)

These numbers tell us that the best way to get the most out of mobile is to focus your efforts on local consumers.

Whenever you launch a mobile campaign or initiative, make sure that it's only targeting consumers who are within a certain radius of your store. Doing so is more effective both from a cost, as well as from a conversion standpoint.

Fortunately, the above-strategies are already local-centric by default. Google, for example, automatically uses the person's location when they run a search without specifying a zip code or city, and the Yowzaa!! app displays deals depending on how close the user is to a store.

There are however, other things you can do reach more local customers:

Improve your store locator page

For starters, you can optimize your mobile store locator. Chances are, those who land on your store locator page are local consumers who need to look up your address or want to get in touch. Make it really simple to complete these actions by ensuring that your store locator is as user-friendly as possible.

Have a store locator button on every page of your mobile site to make it easy for visitors to find you, and see to it that the page has click-to-call and click-to-map buttons.

A report by [PayPal Media](#) found that 57% of mobile landing page clicks are from lower-funnel actions like click-to-map and click-to-call, indicating that these two functions are what mobile shoppers are utilizing the most.

Adding these buttons to your store locator will enable people to get information and directions straight from their mobile device.

Launch a conquering campaign

You can also use a strategy called *competitive conquering*, which is the practice of serving up ads targeting customers who are within the vicinity of your *competitors*.

An example of this in action can be seen in a Best Western hotel branch in Washington. Aside from targeting mobile users near its location and at the airport, the hotel chain implemented a geo-fence campaign that targeted users who are located near the branches of its competitors. Its goal was to increase traffic to its one-click access reservation page. According to the report

above, this resulted in an increase in traffic to its reservation page, allowing Best Western to get in front of its target customers.

Going mobile isn't just an option for retailers anymore. It's a priority. The steps outlined above are easy and inexpensive (some are even free), so take the time to complete them.

Action steps:

1. If you haven't done so yet, list your business on Google, Bing, Yelp, Foursquare, and other relevant sites/directories. Doing so will make it easier for your online customers to find you.
2. Running deals and promotions? Get those offers in front of mobile users by using shopping apps such as Red Laser or Yowza!!
3. Optimize your mobile site. Make sure it's easy to navigate and is fat finger-proof. Use services such as Mobify or Mofuse to get a great mobile site up and running.
4. While you're at it, optimize your store locator page as well. Add a locator button on every part of the site and include click-to-call and click-to-map features.
5. Got a mobile advertising budget? Don't just target people who are within the radius of your store; look up your closest competitors and serve up ads to people in those areas.

Chapter 6

Boosting customer loyalty

I can't think of a single more powerful tool for a business in the modern time than loyalty; it reaches across and slaps the face of businesses that choose to trade only on price and gives you a warm feeling knowing that every time you make a sale you're giving your best customers something back.

- Steve Toze, Marketing Director, Mountain Bike Hall of Famer, Rockets & Rascals



A study by [Marketing Metrics](#) found that the probability of converting existing customers is 60% to 70%. Meanwhile, the probability of converting new shoppers is only 5% to 20%. In addition, [research has shown](#) that repeat shoppers actually spend 33% more compared to new ones.

Clearly, repeat shoppers are the best type of customers to have. Not only are they easier to sell to, but they also tend to spend more. This is why you should make every effort to ensure that your existing customers are happy and that they come back for more.

One way to do this by implementing loyalty programs.

Thanks to advancements in mobile and point-of-sale technology, rewarding loyal customers is easier than ever. No need to worry about those physical cards that take up space, and customers won't have to fill out forms just to enroll in your loyalty program. With the right tools, you can run a rewards program that's seamless, easy, and automatic.

At [Vend](#) for example, our retailers can implement rewards programs simply by switching on the feature and customizing their loyalty setting (ex: \$50 = \$1.00 Loyalty). Customers are automatically added to the program and they can easily redeem their loyalty points as credit against future purchases.

Alternatively, you can also use loyalty apps such as Collect to add more features to your programs. For example, retailers using [Collect](#) can create targeted and personalized offers and send them through smartphone notifications. Retailers can also reward customers not just for purchases, but also by spreading the word to their friends.

One example of a store using Collect is Bird on a Wire, an Auckland-based free range rotisserie chicken joint. Customers earn points whenever they spend at the store and they earn rewards based on their purchases. It truly is a great way to incentivize people to come back.

Modern-day loyalty program best practices

Having a sleek rewards program is great, but it won't be very effective if you don't use it well. For one thing, you have competitors who likely have similar programs in place, so you need to find a way to stand out.

Office Depot [cites](#) that “consumers on average are enrolled in 7.4 loyalty programs. However, each year 53 percent of these members stop participating in at least one loyalty program a year, citing irrelevant reward offerings (68 percent) and slow reward accumulation (50 percent) as top barriers.”

You can address these loyalty program barriers using a number of tactics.

Let’s start with the issue of irrelevant rewards. We’ve noticed that many loyalty programs lack a “personal touch” that make shoppers feel extra valued. Yes, giving customers points that they can redeem for any purchase is a solid approach, but in order to make your loyalty program stand out, you may want to add some special perks for each member.

For example, retailer Sephora has a great loyalty program called Beauty Insider that not only gives members points for every purchase, but also sends birthday gifts, invites to exclusive shopping events, and complimentary beauty classes. On top of that, members of the program can get tailored recommendations based on their profile.

Office Depot is another retailer that’s doing creative things with its loyalty efforts. It started implementing a program that gives customers rewards based on their frequently bought items, shopping behavior, and the amount information that they shared with the brand. According to its announcement, “Customers can sign up for one of three membership types that best describes them: Local Businesses, Loyal Customers or Star Teachers. Members will then receive personalized offers designed exclusively for them.”

Aim to include customized perks and tailored rewards to your loyalty program. This will not only take care of the irrelevant rewards issue that customers have, but it’ll make them feel genuinely rewarded (and in turn more loyal to your brand).

Slow reward accumulation is another concern cited by shoppers when it comes to loyalty programs. To address this, you'll need to go beyond the "points for purchases" model and find other ways to reward customers. For example, you could offer perks when customers check into your store, engage with your brand online, or tell their friends about you. (Note: Collect lets you do this).

Get creative. Find positive actions that your customers can take and reward them for it. Check out Walgreens' loyalty program. Aside from giving people points for the dollars they spend, the pharmacy also rewards members for the healthy activities that they get into.

Users earn points when they link their fitness device to the Walgreens app and they get additional points when they participate in healthy activities like exercising, eating right, tracking their weight, blood pressure, etc.

The program engages people and all those points give them more reasons to shop at Walgreens. Plus, since shoppers are sharing their activities with Walgreens, the company is able to collect more data and get to know their customers even more.

Action steps:

1. Take your rewards programs to the next level. For instance, if you're still using physical cards, it's time you switch to a system that's POS-based (like Vend) or mobile-based (like Collect). Explore your options to see what works best for you.
2. Find ways to personalize the loyalty program experience of your customers. Perhaps you can start sending birthday presents or even consider offering bonus perks based on their previous purchases.
3. Aside from rewarding customers for their purchases, come up with more creative ways to earn points. You can, for example, give perks when they check-in or when they participate in any in-store events.

Chapter 7

Giving your customers an experience they won't soon forget

People are always going to go shopping. A lot of our effort is just: how do we make the retail experience a great one?

- Sir Philip Green, CEO of the Arcadia Group, a retail giant that includes Topshop, BHS and Dorothy Perkins



In order to stay relevant, retail stores must reinvent themselves and provide unique and noteworthy experiences to their customers.

You need to give them something more than just the ability to buy things from your store, because as the e-commerce industry has proven, consumers can make purchases from just about anywhere these days.

It's important—now more than ever—to think outside the box and move beyond the traditional ways of operating a retail store. Find ways to make the shopping experience easy, modern, and fun for consumers.

Here are a few ideas and examples of what you can do:

Hold events

Invite your customers to come in for special events. Doing so gives you the opportunity to connect with your customers and educate them about your products. Consider for instance, what The Village Winery is doing.

For the 2013 holiday season, the retailer held free tasting events in its stores to educate shoppers about wine and to help them pick out Christmas presents.

“Tasting is perhaps the best way to learn about wine. It is certainly the most enjoyable. The in store tasting events provide a relaxed environment for customers to learn the basics and how to get more enjoyment out of wine,” said Jill, co-owner of The Village Winery.

“The tastings in the store also offer us the opportunity to talk to customers about the wines they have tried and which ones they like more than others, which enables us to help identify what characteristics they like about a wine and give good recommendations.”

Whole Foods is doing something similar in its Detroit location. Earlier this year, the grocery chain opened an education center to give consumers free lessons in cooking and nutrition. All classes are held in a separate kitchen facility from the store and are taught by their resident health expert.

Aside from enabling Whole Foods to connect with the local community, it's likely that the Nutrition & Culinary Education Center helps drive in-store traffic and sales for the grocery chain.

Empower your associates

The main trump card that brick and mortar stores have over e-commerce sites is—and will always be—personal interactions. That’s why it’s essential that you employ people who understand and know how to use this advantage.

Educate your staff to become “likeable experts” instead of salespeople. Teach them to help, and not sell. Instill in them that customer satisfaction and experience trumps profits.

How do you do this? For one thing, don’t make them work on commission because it will only incentivize them to sell more expensive products instead of really helping customers.

The right training is important. Teach your staff to put customers’ interests before revenue. Educate them about your products and make sure they know your company inside and out so they can effectively explain things to shoppers.

Apple is a prime example of a business that does this well. As [Ron Johnson, its former VP for Retail said](#), people choose to buy products at Apple Stores instead of Best Buy, Walmart, or Amazon (despite the fact that these competitors often offer lower prices) because of the experience that its staff provides.

“The staff isn’t focused on selling stuff, it’s focused on [building relationships](#) and trying to make people’s lives better,” Johnson said.

Another example of a retailer pulling this off quite well is Nike.

Leggett & Platt’s Mark Quinn shared an [interesting story on Business Insider](#) about how a Nike store’s staff put education first before even selling him a pair. He wrote:

The sales staff wouldn’t let me buy a pair of shoes unless I got on a treadmill. They taped my running style and then explained what type of shoe would be best for me, based on my running tendencies. They played the video back for me, explaining how my foot fell on the treadmill and how that one movement translated

to a certain kind of support. I was hooked into buying shoes — and coming back — because they'd taken the time to educate me.

Strive to have that same education-centric strategy in your store. Train your associates to be helpful. Teach them to determine the customer's needs first, before making any recommendations.

Personalize shopper experiences

One-size-fits all marketing just won't cut it anymore, which is why retailers should start implementing solutions to personalize each customer's experience.

One of the best ways to accomplish this is by using Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE), a technology that lets Bluetooth 4.0 devices such as PayPal Beacon, Estimote, and iBeacon, communicate with smartphones. Through it, retailers can send tailored notifications to each shopper's device, depending on where they are in the store.

Major League Baseball effectively demonstrated this technology when it [tested Apple's iBeacon](#) at the Citi Field stadium in New York. Users who have MLB's app will be able to get customized messages, based on their location in the stadium. For example, when they arrive at the gates, the app can give them directions towards their seats. If they're near a particular shop or booth (say a hotdog stand) they can get store-specific deals. The app can also send tailored offers, depending on whether someone is a first-time visitor or a long-time fan.

You can also personalize each customer's experience by tailoring your services and recommendations based on their purchase history and shopping behavior.

For example, shoppers who walk into Burberry stores will see that associates are armed with iPads that they can use to provide real-time product information and availability. Not only that, but according to [Retail Info Systems News](#), associates also have a ton of customer information at their fingertips, "including if the consumer opts in, their shopping behavior, what shops around the world they purchase from, what they have in their basket

online,” and more, enabling them to provide personalized offers and recommendations instantly.

Utilize mobile technology

Offering free in-store Wi-Fi so your customers can surf on their smartphones is the easiest way to do this. I know it seems counterintuitive—after all why make it easier for users to surf the web or price check? However, the practice can actually attract people into your shop. Customers are conscious about using up their data plans, so they’ll be happy to grab a chance to access the web for free. Give customers that opportunity, and they’ll flock towards your location.

Having free Wi-Fi also enables you to capture more information about customers. You can ask for shoppers’ email addresses before connecting, and they usually won’t mind providing that information in order to go online.

In addition, offering in-store Wi-Fi will allow you to send text or email promotions while users are connected. [Research shows](#) that shoppers actually appreciate this. A study from OnDeviceResearch indicates that “74% of respondents would be happy for a retailer to send a text or email with promotions while they’re using in-store wi-fi.”

You can also utilize the technology by accepting mobile payments. That’s what Christina Ruiz, owner of TopShelf Boutique, is doing. On top of honoring the usual cash and credit card payments, TopShelf Boutique also allows customers to pay using their PayPal app.

“People can use their phone to check in to my store and then their photo pops up in my POS system. That allows me to ring them up without asking for any identification, cash or credit card,” said Christina. “I think it’s nice because it saves time and it’s also secure.”

Aside from offering an added convenience to customers, providing them with the option to pay with their phone gives TopShelf

Boutique more opportunities to complete a sale. For instance, if a customer forgets their wallet in their car or office, they can simply whip out their phone and pay. The customer stays happy because they get to purchase the items they want hassle-free, and TopShelf Boutique doesn't have to miss the opportunity for a sale.

Don't just sell merchandise; sell lifestyles and experiences

Exert more effort in branding and avoid commoditizing your products. What makes you unique? What emotions or thoughts can you evoke in your customers? Identify these things and use them as selling points. Use them to attract customers who can relate to your brand and messages.

In doing so, you will not only differentiate your business from competitors, but you'll establish a deeper connection with your customers and gain more loyal patrons.

Case in point: Urban Outfitters sells more than just apparel or stuff for the home. Through its unique branding, design, and the attitude of its staff, this retailer goes beyond merchandise and instead sells a hip, urban lifestyle.

There's just something about the way the store markets itself that gives it a strong, hip vibe. Sure, consumers can probably find similar products online, but since those items don't have the Urban Outfitters oomph, shoppers choose to swing by UO stores instead.

Identify and nurture tribes

It's important that you create a store experience for a specific group of people (aka: tribe) rather than cater to the masses. This is also known as tribetailing, the practice of tailoring everything you do—from your store design, to your ads, to your employees—for a particular market segment.

Tribetailing helps create a more powerful experience and enables you to forge stronger connections with shoppers. The more

customers can relate to your store, the better their experience will be.

In addition, being aware of your store's tribe will also make it easier for you to craft relevant campaigns, offers, and content.

A lot of small retail shops, boutiques, or specialty stores will likely only cater to one tribe—a particular group that can be identified by their demographic information (age, gender, location), generation (boomers, Gen X, millennials), or even interests (musicians, gamers, craft beer lovers).

If you have a type of store that speaks to just one tribe, see to it that everything you do serves them. Consider for instance, the Keio department store in Japan. A retail location that caters to the elderly, everything in the store is put in place with older consumers in mind. Its shelves are lower, signs are in large, easy-to-understand fonts, and most of the store's associates are in their 50s and 60s. In addition, the dining area mostly serves old-fashioned foods, and there are chairs all around the store so tired shoppers can take a rest.

On the flip side, if your store happens to cater to more than one tribe, what you can do is establish different departments (or even stores) for each segment.

Check out what Target is doing. On top of its department stores, Target recently opened up TargetExpress, a smaller version of its store that's meant specifically for consumers in dense, urban markets.

Target's tribetailing efforts also extend to social media. It created special social accounts such as Target Style (for fashionistas) and Target Baby (for parents with babies).

Consider doing something similar if you're trying to reach multiple tribes.

Action steps:

1. Organize an in-store event! It could be a class, workshop, or just a simple social gathering that'll give you and your customers a chance to bond.
2. Have a talk with your staff about educating shoppers. Train them to be problem-solvers or advice-givers rather than just salespeople.
3. Explore ways to utilize mobile technology in your store—you have plenty of options! Whether it's adopting mobile payments, using beacons, or simply offering free Wi-Fi, having a more mobile-centric store can make a difference in the customer experience.
4. Step up your tribetailing efforts. If you haven't done so yet, study your target customers and identify their tribe. Then, evaluate your store and see to it that every component caters to the tribe you want to reach.

Conclusion: What's next?

Action, that's what. Now that you know what needs to be done to survive and thrive in the modern age of retail, it's time that you forge your own path to retail success.

The next logical steps will depend on where your business currently is. Are you starting from scratch, or do you have a fairly strong web presence? Do you have an existing loyalty program? Are you collecting customer data?

Determining where you stand is critical, so conduct an honest evaluation of your business then figure out the best course of action going forward. For instance, if you find that you're running an old-fashioned rewards program (i.e. you're still using physical cards) then start looking for more modern alternatives. Is your online presence weak or non-existent? Change that by setting up your Google and Yelp profile.

Making the journey to retail success easier

One thing you need to remember is that you're not alone in your pursuit of retail success. There plenty of other businesses who are on the same path—heck, you've already met some of them in this book.

Know that if you have questions, need to pick someone's brain, or simply want to be around those who are going through the same things, there are always people you can turn to.

Use services such as Meetup.com or Eventbrite to search for retail-centric groups and events in your area.

Also be sure to check out [Vend's Events page](#). We often host [user groups](#), [parties](#), and [meet-ups](#) for retailers, so if you're ever in the area (we hold events in various cities) make it a point to stop by.

Online, you can find excellent LinkedIn groups for retailers, including [ALLRETAIL retail executive network](#), [InStore Trends](#), [Retail Industry Professionals Group](#), [RETAIL SPEAK™](#) by [Sanford Stein Author of RETAIL SCHMETAIL™](#) and more. Pop in if you have any questions or wish to start discussions about running a store.

Your move

There you have it! By now you should have a solid idea of what it takes to make it in the modern retail world. So go out there, and take the learnings, examples, and action steps in this book, so you can apply them in your business.

And if you're looking for a solution that can help you through all this, [sign up for a free 30-day trial of Vend](#) and see how it can help you future-proof your store.

Good luck!

About Vend

[Vend](#) is a cloud-based retail software platform that enables retailers to accept payments, manage their inventories, reward customer loyalty and garner insights into their business in real-time.

Vend is simple to set up, works with a wide range of point-of-sale devices and operates on any web-capable device with a browser. Whether it's simplifying the inventory process, cutting 30 minutes from their end-of-day bookkeeping or making it simpler for them to sell their products on multiple channels, Vend's mission is to make retailers' lives easier.

With Vend, small/independent retailers are able to focus less on transaction and inventory concerns and more on creating that relationship with their customers. Vend aims to give the small guys the big advantages, putting the power into retailers' hands and enabling them to do things themselves—and succeed.

About the Author



Francesca Nicasio is a retail expert and author from [Vend](#), a point-of-sale, inventory, and customer loyalty software that helps over 12,000 retailers manage and grow their businesses.

She's constantly writing about trends, tips, and other things that can help retailers increase sales, serve customers better, and be more awesome overall. In addition to being a top retail author on LinkedIn, Francesca's work has been published on several reputable sites, including Retail Customer Experience, Street Fight, and more.

When she's not writing about retail, you'll likely find her dishing out advice for aspiring writers, enjoying a meal at the nearest KBBQ joint, or watching reruns of *Friends*.

You can connect with Francesca on Twitter or LinkedIn. If you ever need to talk to someone about anything retail or writing-related, feel free to get in touch!

Retail Survival of the Fittest: 7 Ways to Future-Proof Your Retail Store is a practical guide to modern-day retail success. Learn how to use mobile technology, big data, and other digital tools to improve your brick-and-mortar store and ensure that it is well-equipped to engage and convert today's savvy shoppers.

From understanding consumers and boosting customer loyalty to leveraging data and implementing an omnichannel retail strategy, Retail Survival of the Fittest gives you need-to-know lessons on how to adapt to the new and increasingly competitive retail playing field.

In addition to providing insights and how-to tips, Retail Survival of the Fittest also introduces you to other successful merchants and shows you exactly what they do to thrive in the modern retail realm.

Most important, each chapter comes with a set of action steps to help you implement the tips discussed in the book and enable you to get started on future-proofing your store.

