

VoCoVo

Ebook

# Optimising Operational Resources with Voice Communication Technology



[VoCoVo.com](https://www.VoCoVo.com)

## How to leverage voice communication technology to navigate shop floor shortages

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a seismic impact on the retail industry. Over the last 18 months, we have seen 17,5321 store closures, with longstanding brands like Debenhams, Beales, and Edinburgh Woollen Mill collapsing into administration. Britain's retail employers have been struggling with the worst labour shortages since the late 1990s as the pandemic forced them to furlough or lay off some workers to stay afloat. Adding to the labour crisis, the post-Brexit immigration rules combined with the coronavirus border restrictions mean fewer EU citizens are allowed to enter the country for work.

When the eagerly anticipated 'freedom day' finally arrived in the UK on 19th July, celebrations were unfortunately short-lived. The end of lockdown and social contact restrictions were supposed to help businesses turn the page and write a new post-pandemic recovery chapter. However, as the rules eased, chaos began and the 'pingdemic' descended upon the hard hit and struggling retail industry.



Over the past month, hundreds of thousands of workers have been forced to self-isolate after getting 'pinged' by the NHS Track and Trace app. The rising wave of retail workers having to stay at home has had a tremendous impact on businesses' operations, and as a result, their ability to provide best-in-class customer service. Whilst some sectors, such as energy, waste, or emergency services, have been exempt by the government from the latest COVID-19 self-isolation rules, retail was left behind. With no plans to include retail employees on the list of exempt key workers, employers need to address a growing and urgent need to ensure operational efficiency when facing labour shortages during the 'pingdemic'.

This eBook explores the benefits of voice communication technology and how leveraging it can help retailers overcome the latest labour challenges, improve their operations and enhance customer experience (CX) during the 'pingdemic' and beyond.



## 4 Key benefits of voice communication technology

From better knowledge sharing between colleagues and the head office to improved security and increased employee morale, retail businesses can go some way towards navigating the impact of the 'pingdemic' by putting the right communication technology in place.

### 1. More efficient knowledge sharing

One of the biggest retail casualties of the 'pingdemic' has been the loss of intellectual capital on the shop floor due to large numbers of experienced workers being forced to self-isolate. Knowledge sharing is incredibly important in all retail shops to ensure operational efficiency and great customer experience, but in particular in DIY or pet stores where customers expect employees to hold specialist levels of expertise to help them make informed purchasing decisions.

Many retailers upped their recruitment efforts in recent weeks to compensate for the temporary loss of workers. However, in order for new employees to start bringing value to the business and its customers, they require training. With the urgent need to get new starters up to speed with their responsibilities, this has to happen on the job. The same applies to those stepping in for self-isolating colleagues as businesses have to increasingly rotate employees into different roles and store areas.

That's where voice communication technology can be of huge help. New colleagues can use headsets to ask questions, find product information or check stock levels without having to run across the store to track down their manager, improving their efficiency and knowledge base from the start. Equally, for existing employees needing to take on new tasks or responsibilities, facilitating better communication on the shop floor makes this transition more seamless.

Sharing knowledge more efficiently between team members will help retailers ensure smooth operations during times of labour shortages, guaranteeing the same level of service to customers to maintain their loyalty.



## 2. Better protection and security

All too often retail workers face abuse as they go about their jobs. This has got worse since the onset of the pandemic with 4553 incidents now reported every single day compared to 350 in 2016/17. If we take a typical 9-hour trading day, that's one incident every 75 seconds.

Violence against colleagues isn't the only security challenge facing by retailers today. VoCoVo's research showed that over a third of UK retail workers have experienced store theft since the pandemic began, meaning shoplifters have certainly been taking advantage of skeleton staffing levels.

More self-isolating employees during the 'pingdemic' means a greater chance of workers being left alone on the shop floor, often late at night, which puts their wellbeing at great risk. A staggering three-quarters (75%) of retail workers fear for their safety on shift, indicating that employers need to take immediate action to improve their security measures and protect their colleagues.

By deploying internal communication technology, such as headsets, vulnerable shop floor colleagues can gain the confidence to do their jobs and deal with would-be thieves or abusers. With the right system in place, colleagues will feel safer as they can discretely contact security teams at the push of a button whenever they face a threat or see something suspicious.

For stores regularly targeted by thieves, configuring wearable technology like headsets to trigger a pre-recorded security announcement has proven to deter would-be thieves in the past. Such store-wide tannoy messages can be easily issued by any colleague, therefore, empowering them to take action against shoplifters.



Customised keypads also allow workers to call for backup easily when being faced with an abusive shopper at the checkout without the need to leave their position. To further protect employees, voice communication technology integrates with phone systems so that emergency services can be contacted from anywhere in the store. Headsets can be set up to recognise certain safe words which when spoken, will automatically alert in-store security or the police.

Prevention is the key when it comes to keeping employees safe, not only during the 'pingdemic' but at all times. The use of communication tools such as headsets acts as a powerful visual deterrent as they are immediately recognisable, making customers think twice before behaving in an abusive way. They also empower front line colleagues with the knowledge that even during quiet shifts or times of labour shortages, they're not alone on the shop floor.



## 3. A direct link to HQ

The unpredictable nature of the 'pingdemic' calls for reliable, transparent and immediate communication between HQ and the shop floor. Management has to ensure that important information is never missed, especially with COVID-19 safety measures or staffing levels liable to change at short notice.

With multiple stores in a network, it is inefficient to contact each of them individually and have a store manager broadcast an update themselves. It can be tricky with social distancing measures, staggered shift patterns or rotating employees to get the team together and communicate changes.

Rather than waiting for the next team meeting, network-wide messaging technology enables HQ to get in touch with all stores at once, either immediately or at a scheduled time. Triggered updates can go out automatically in response to a large number of colleagues forced to self-isolate, informing those working of changes to their responsibilities. The message casting feature can give colleagues peace of mind and allow them to implement new practices straight away. When employees are kept regularly updated and given clear explanations, they are more likely to be engaged in their roles and focused on delivering great customer service during this unprecedented time.



#### 4. Increased employee morale

Along the bumpy road to the 'new normal', employers need to find ways to strengthen their culture and increase employee morale. When employees receive the right support and feel like a valuable part of the team, they are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, therefore, more productive too. High employee engagement drives customer satisfaction, and vice versa, hence it is important retailers prioritise wellbeing and reduce further absenteeism during the ongoing staff shortages.

By streamlining internal communication, team members can share knowledge more effectively and efficiently, and be each other's support. When the need develops to cover a self-isolating colleague's shift, they are better equipped to perform their new tasks well. They can serve customers better and faster, meeting their need for seamless in-store shopping experiences.

In addition, being connected to colleagues instils greater confidence to prevent thefts without putting anyone at risk. With better security measures in stores, employees will feel safer and more protected, which positively impacts their mental health and team morale.



#### The link between internal communication and CX

The pandemic has forever changed consumer expectations and behaviour. As a result, bricks-and-mortar retailers have to compete with the convenience, speed and greater personalisation offered by online shopping, which grew in popularity during lockdowns when physical stores were forced to close. The accelerated need for seamless experiences amongst post-pandemic shoppers requires businesses to immediately reinvent their CX strategies to attract more customers and boost their loyalty.

VoCoVo's post-pandemic retail survey revealed a number of common customer pain-points that need addressing in order to create best-in-class experiences:

- 82% of customers feel they sometimes know more about products than colleagues
- 34% are frustrated by stock shortages
- 22% are frustrated by waiting times at the checkout
- 22% are frustrated by colleague inefficiency

All these frustrations have one thing in common – poor communication. With customers increasingly expecting instant experiences that replicate online service, retailers should move towards connected stores, using technology and data to offer greater personalisation and best-in-class service. Utilising voice communication tools can help ensure efficient shopping experiences and eliminate communication barriers between team members.

By installing call points across stores, retailers can empower customers to request help there and then, significantly reducing their need to physically search for an employee on the shop floor. They can easily talk to a colleague, check stock levels, or find product information themselves. Streamlining internal communication with technology helps shorten waiting times at checkouts and answer queries quicker, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.



## Conclusion

In the face of the current labour crisis, retailers are battling to ensure smooth operations and win customers' loyalty. Post-pandemic recovery may have been temporarily disturbed by the 'pingdemic', however, customers still expect high quality experiences and fast service as they ease back to shopping in physical stores.

In implementing technologies that better connect elements of a store, retailers can ensure increased operational efficiencies now and in the future. Whilst the 'pingdemic' presents immediate staff shortage challenges, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for quite some time. It is, therefore, important businesses utilise voice communication technology to enable recovery, improve profitability and boost customer satisfaction.

## About VoCoVo

Established in 2016, VoCoVo enables businesses to release the power of voice. Currently used by 30 tier 1 global retailers and active in 6,000 stores with 83,000 users, VoCoVo's solutions drive actionable insights that empower retailers to improve employee communication and make better decisions that enhance customer experience and drive profitability.

Based in the Cotswolds, VoCoVo is growing fast with customers across the UK, Europe, Australia, Canada and America. In 2019 the company became a winner of the Deloitte Technology Fast 50 Award and a finalist in the Santander Growing Business of the Year Award.

## References

- 1 <https://www.pwc.co.uk/industries/retail-consumer/insights/store-openings-and-closures.html>
- 2 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-57970603>
- 3 <https://brc.org.uk/media/677737/brc-crime-survey-2021.pdf>
- 4 <https://www.vocovo.com/forgotten-frontline/>
- 5 <https://www.vocovo.com/blog/post/how-can-vocovo-improve-colleague-safety-typical-results-we-see/>
- 6 <https://resources.vocovo.com/retail-reunited>

With such technology in place, new and existing team members can share information more efficiently, learning on the job and offering instant responses to customer queries. A direct link to HQ means any changes to safety measures or working patterns can be communicated more effectively and implemented immediately. Communication tools can also help prevent rising colleague abuse and store theft, which in turn positively impacts employee morale and satisfaction.

Establishing a connected store will not only help retailers provide seamless shopping experiences for their customers, but also ensure high colleague engagement and advocacy. Those bricks-and-mortar stores which can successfully leverage technology to improve their communication will be better equipped to overcome staffing challenges, compete with more convenient e-commerce and prosper in the future.





VocoVo

Start your journey towards a  
better connected team

Wychwood Business Centre  
Shipton-Under-Wychwood Oxfordshire OX7 6XU

T. +44 (0) 3301 373789 | E. [sales@vocovo.com](mailto:sales@vocovo.com)

[vocovo.com](http://vocovo.com)

