

# VocoVo

eBook

# Retail, Disconnected



# Retail, Disconnected?

The retail landscape is getting smarter, with new technologies continuously being introduced to transform customer experience (CX) and improve operational efficiencies. On the surface, this looks like the perfect solution to ease the challenges created by the pandemic and meet heightened customer expectations for personalized and seamless shopping experiences. However, the decisions to take on emerging tools and to adopt bold digital strategies are often being made in the boardroom, without consulting associates in stores.

This siloed decision-making process can prove a costly mistake. A lack of understanding at board level about current technology adoption rates and what additional tools associates would find helpful can perpetuate a disconnect, which can lead to poor morale and ultimately, negatively impact CX. Sometimes it can be as simple as the solutions used by one department being incompatible with another, or adoption could be lower from store to store due to insufficient training.

The disconnect between plans made by corporate leadership and the challenges faced by associates on the

sales floor must therefore be resolved if retailers are to realize the full potential of technology, attract new customers, and boost staff retention of staff in an increasingly competitive labor market.

Retail technology solutions provider, VoCoVo, undertook a survey of both in-store employees and decision makers at retailers with over 100 stores across the UK, the USA, and Germany. This included 1,003 associates with over six months' experience in retail and 258 senior retail decision makers, in 100 stores.

The research set out to understand the true scale of the disconnect between the technology needed in stores and the technology that retailers have implemented so far or have future plans to do so. With a focus on smart technology adoption rates and the biggest challenges for customer-facing teams, the findings shine a light on three key areas where this disconnect must be addressed to ensure a truly connected retail experience.



# 1. Are new smart technology investments actually what store associates need?

Although the benefits of smart technology on the sales floor are huge, realizing them might be hindered by corporate leadership not having a full picture of the problems that customer-facing associates deal with. This is highlighted by the way associates feel about leadership.

**30%**

of associates don't think corporate leadership has an accurate understanding of their challenges.

Retailers could be throwing money away, risking low adoption rates, and still battling the same problems on the sales floor after implementation, simply because new tech isn't fit for purpose.

This is a concerning discovery as **63% of retailers plan to implement more smart solutions in their stores in the next year**. If greater effort isn't made to bridge the communication distance between headquarters and shop floor colleagues, retailers risk spending money on technology that is 'nice to have' rather than necessity – particularly as **41% of associates feel that head office doesn't consider their needs when choosing new smart solutions**.

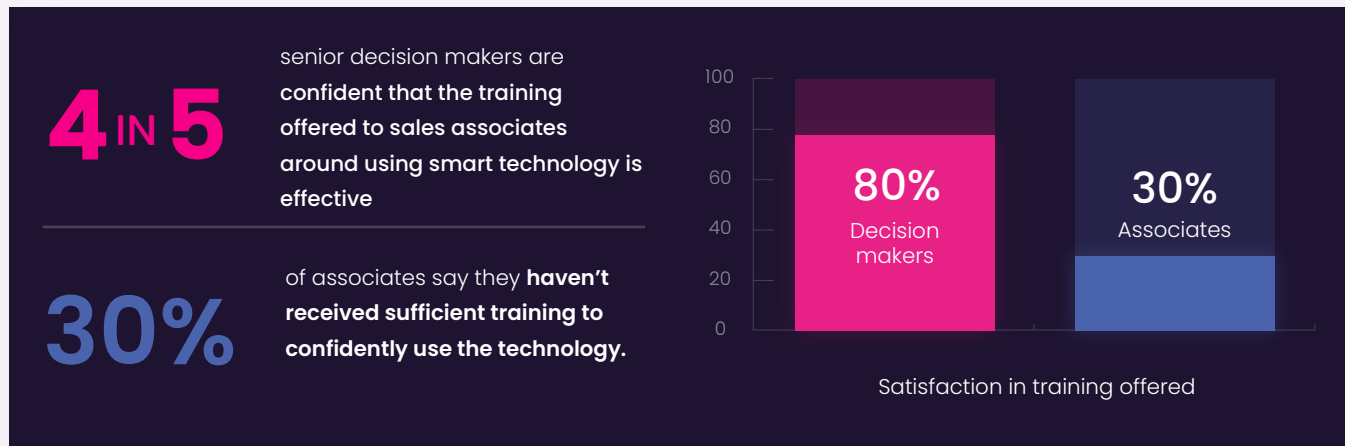


There is a simple solution, however, to ensure new technology investments are the right ones to ease the challenges faced by customer-facing associates.

The panacea for closing this disconnect is opening an honest dialogue and fostering transparent communication between associates and headquarters. Whether it's via an online feedback survey or team meetings, associates should be offered a variety of clear channels through which to voice their opinions and share pain points—and equally suggest solutions—whilst decision makers should demonstrate they can actively listen and use the insights from their store teams to guide their decision making.

It's a win-win because retailers will be better positioned to invest in solutions that are actually needed, while associates leverage new technology to make their jobs easier.

## 2. A training blind spot



This blind spot could be impeding the efforts to successfully roll out smart technology solutions across stores. A lack of comprehensive and regular training on smart technology doesn't just affect associates, it has a knock-on effect on CX because poorly trained associates are more prone to making mistakes and struggle to effectively use the tech available to them. As a result, they may keep customers waiting while they search for information or technology functionality, causing frustration or even walkouts.

The risk of worsening customer service isn't the only reason for addressing the training disconnect. Just over three-

quarters of associates are covering additional responsibilities because their stores are short staffed. In this turbulent labor market, technology could be the answer store managers need to unlock greater efficiency and productivity, and ensure better team morale in busy periods.

Closing the gap in training is crucial, not only to maximize the ROI of smart technology investments, but also to ensure devices are fully supporting associates in delivering better CX, making them feel safer, and improving efficiencies until labor shortages resolve.

Importantly, training cannot be a one-off exercise, either at the start of an associate's employment or at the point of new technology being implemented. It should be revisited frequently to ensure best practice is maintained, particularly if new smart devices are introduced that impact existing functionality.

In addition, it's important retailers consider how they're delivering training to help with its effectiveness across different employee demographics. While younger, more tech-savvy associates might need less time to grasp all the functionality of smart devices, other colleagues might need more. Therefore, personalizing training to individuals is crucial. If it's common practice to deliver the training as a 30-minute sit-down meeting in the boardroom, it might be more beneficial to switch the approach and deploy on-the-job training under the supervision of a more experienced colleague. This will speed up the onboarding process and create an engaging refresher training experience, allowing greater connectivity to sweep across the retail stores.

### 3. Reassurance needed over the role of human employees in the future

After a challenging two years of working through the global pandemic, retailers need to keep team morale high to ensure retention in a competitive labor market.

Whilst there are plenty of day-to-day advantages of smart devices for retail associates, technology can also introduce a surprising level of uncertainty. Especially when it comes to the future of retail and associates' place in that vision.

**85%**

of senior decision makers consider the role of human associates on the sales floor as important for the future.

**34%**

of associates worry they will eventually be replaced by smart technology

Whether it's because corporate leadership continues to introduce new smart solutions in stores, making associates feel insecure about their jobs, or the media continuing to highlight business stories about robots replacing humans in retail environments, there needs to be clearer

communication and reassurance from the top to put associates' minds at rest. Technology will continue to evolve and provide exciting new experiences for shoppers, but the human touch will still play a key role in the future of retail.



It should be a priority for leadership teams to ensure that associates understand this and can fully embrace the functionality of smart devices, knowing that they're there to support, not threaten, their positions. Open and honest conversations as part of change management around this should happen to highlight the exciting opportunities smart tech offers. This will also help with future recruitment as those wishing to pursue a career in retail would want to know their progression opportunities.

Company meetings can provide a good forum for this kind of communication. Store managers and leadership teams can leverage these moments to address associates' concerns, reassure them they'll be a vital part of the sales floor in the future, and set out the vision of how smart technology will integrate into their jobs.

# Retail, Reconnected.



With retail stores becoming more and more connected, it's time to pause and re-evaluate whether the technology currently implemented is meeting expectations and easing the biggest challenges faced by customer-facing associates. Addressing the above three key areas of disconnect will help to reduce barriers that are hindering retailers' abilities to fully leverage smart devices, and instead reconnect headquarters with sales floor teams.

Transparent and open communication between the decision makers and associates should always be at the heart of closing these disconnects. Whether it's training effectiveness or the role of human employees in the future, being on the same page when it comes to smart technology implementation will not only help maximize retailers' return on investment, but also increase associates' job satisfaction, boost team morale, and increase retention.

With smart technology working alongside human associates and being fully embraced by them, retailers can realize their vision of truly connected stores that customers want to visit time and time again.



## About VoCoVo

Established in 2016, VoCoVo drives transformation in retail communications to maximize operational efficiency and enhance customer experience for leading global retailers. Now connecting over 100,000 associates in 21 countries through voice, their retail-ready hardware, software, and smart integrations power store teams across Grocery, Home Improvement, and Fashion.

VoCoVo is growing fast and is trusted by household names in the UK, Europe, Australia, and North America. The company has a list of accolades, from regional Business of the Year and Innovation awards to 5th place in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100.



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