



The Foundational Tool Which Empowers Associates To Advocate New Technologies

The Idea of 'If You Build It, Associates Will Figure It Out' Is Simply a Waste of Time and Money, and Why Most Retail IT Projects Fail

More retailers are opening stores than closing them and are investing in new technologies that help propel their businesses in an evolving industry, stated Forrester Retail Analyst Sucharita Kodali, during her presentation at NRF 2019: Retail's Big Show.

Leading retailers now are investing at an unprecedented rate in these IT transformations, according to IHL Group: Not only is store IT investment growth greater than overall IT growth, but *retail sales leaders are investing in store IT at a growth rate 70% higher than average retailers and so are moving further ahead.* In its reported titled [Stored Advantage – Why Leading Retailers are Doubling Down on Stores¹](#), IHL states that “leading retailers are racing ahead in investments to empower associates with better tools and optimizing order fulfillment execution at the store level. And while online sales continue to grow, leading retailers realize that more than 80% of all retail will still have a store execution component even five years from now.”

That's why, says IHL, the top IT priorities

of retailers for 2019 include investments for the following:

- Personalizing the Customer Experience
- Empowering Store Associates
- CRM/Customer Relationship Solutions
- Refreshing POS Infrastructure
- IT Transformation

The Connected Associate

Especially as new customer-facing initiatives roll out -- such as stronger personalization, BOPIS, inventory look-up, new merchandising strategies, clienteling, mobile wallets, mobile POS, RFID, digital offers, product visualization, stock optimization and more (it's head-spinning) -- retailers must stay focused on **creating and empowering connected associates** who understand and value the importance of leveraging these new tech investments.

To truly advocate new software that may modify standard operating procedures, associates must be trained on its use and, more importantly, be convinced to care. Store management first must build a firm foundation for training

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and demonstrating how and why the new tools can make the associate's job easier, more efficient and more lucrative. Just as a strong foundation keeps your house from blowing over in a storm, retailers need a proper foundation for inciting advocacy of the frontline associate technology stack.

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IHL Group

Take CRM, for example: The benefit of this tool comes months later as customer data -- birthdays, past purchases, sizes, color preferences, etc. -- is gathered. The best way to convince associates to care about and advocate data collection is to share brief video scenarios that bring to life how that data, built over time, empowers associates to provide better, more personalized and effective customer service.

In its [Winter 2018/2019 Consumer View](#)², NRF reported that in a survey of retail consumers regarding their expectations for browsing, buying and engaging with brands, the most important fundamental identified was quality customer service. While respondents stated that free shipping (60%), the ability to buy online (58%), flexible returns (57%) and other offerings were important, the most valued was quality customer service (63%).

After all, it's the human interaction with customers that best offsets online competition. That's why another common theme throughout this year's NRF show was the significance of human interactions in retail environments, [according to NRF SmartBrief](#)³: It's important to combine tech and the human touch in the form of the "connected associate" who fulfills the demands of today's digital consumers while also facilitating meaningful interactions and fostering loyalty. Human connections help retailers innovate and give their brands life in the eyes of their customers, SmartBrief reported.

To create the connected associate -- one who can leverage new customer-facing technologies to cross-

sell, upsell, create loyalty and win -- it is essential to proactively initiate a foundational platform of instant chainwide associate communications, brand training and engaging video-based technology with which management can measure associate knowledge, engagement and impact, and ultimately track ROI of new store IT investments.

"When installing new technologies, associates must be trained appropriately on the entire technology stack in order to be connected and effective," states Greg Buzek, president of IHL. "The idea of 'if you build it, associates will figure it out' is simply a waste of time and money, and why most IT projects fail in retail. The challenge is that we are all so pressed for time and take on too much. This applies personally but also to organizations. By limiting innovation projects to those with the biggest returns and that can be fully deployed, understood by the store team and measured, retailers can see more success on the projects they undertake."

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Buy-in From Top Down Will INCITE® Innovation

In fact, although excitement continues about retail innovation, the store of the future and a digital-first customer experience, "today's retail corporations make meaningful innovation almost impossible" and are "far from delivering what they must to guard against doomsday scenarios for their physical stores," stated Scott Emmons, former head of Neiman Marcus' innovation lab for 16 years.

In an [opinion piece featured on Business of Fashion](#)⁴, Emmons said that traditional retail players aren't innovating the right way because "processes are broken, execution is too slow, politics stalls decision-making and resources are too scarce."

It's time for that to change, he asserted: Even though Neiman Marcus iLab has been ranked a frontrunner in retail by several media outlets over the years, "all

its innovations are far from enough for any retailer to win in the long run. We need to do more. And faster. The trouble is that internal challenges in a large corporation today makes the job of an innovator — whether you're the CIO, CDO, CMO or Head of Digital — nearly impossible.”

Emmons said three of the main roadblocks to innovation are: 1) lack of buy-in, 2) poor strategy and 3) lack of resources.

Elaborating on the first, Emmons stated that technology and innovation need to be something the executive leadership really believes in to empower internal leaders to evangelize change, cut through the politics and roadblocks created by the clashing of CMOs, CTOs and CIOs, and ultimately create excitement for those in the company that will implement such innovations.

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Associates: The Frontline Ambassadors of In-store Technology

“When deploying new technologies into a store, it is critical that sales teams understand the use case and are fully trained in its operation,” Emmons declared. “Sales associates are the frontline ambassadors to in-store technology; if they are not engaged, the tech will end up in the corner gathering dust. Ignoring the training that must accompany technology deployments can easily doom them to failure. But such training can only successfully take place with support from the C-suite.”

“I could not agree more with Scott,” claims James Dion, president of Dionco Inc., a retail consultancy.

“Retailers are beyond famous for not investing in training for frontline staff. The day that retailers learn that store associates are an asset to be deployed and protected, not an expense to be cut and rigidly controlled, will be the day they can begin to build a truly sustainable, profitable and fun business.”

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The Mobile INCITE® Video-based Associate Network

Retailers can deliver everything discussed in this paper – empowered associates, advocacy, technology training, video engagement, measurable results, impact on ROI and more – with INCITE®, the industry's first Mobile Associate Communications Platform (mACP) and foundational platform for new technologies.

INCITE® is a sophisticated, highly branded, mobile-first private broadcast network with instant-on, non-streaming video; self-publishing interface; granular targeting; real-time metrics; field accessibility; instant, internal global broadcasting from an app; and a simple dashboard interface. Already it has delivered more than 1 million programs and 5 million modules to associates in 22 countries.

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INCITE®'s HD video content is downloaded in the background; it resides in and is retrieved from the device's memory, with no streaming, so users experience no exacerbating loads or hiccups - just instant-on and persuasive education and communications.

You Can Empower Associates to Advocate New Technologies

If you are among the retailers investing in and building new frontline technologies, help associates figure it all out: Motivate, guide and incite associates with a foundational platform that helps explain the technology use case, demonstrate its benefits, incite engagement and advocacy, and measure impact and ROI.

To find out more, contact Multimedia Plus at (212) 982-322-9853 or info@multimediamplus.com.

About Multimedia Plus

Multimedia Plus (MMP), the creator of and leader in mACP (Mobile Associate Communications Platform), is transforming the way brands engage globally with app-based communications for the frontline to improve performance. MMP's proprietary technology platform, INCITE® powered by QuizScore®, ensures performance and execution of company strategies – where it counts – with customers. INCITE® has surpassed the delivery of over 1 million programs and 5 million modules to associates in 22 countries.



Footnotes:

1. <https://www.ihlservices.com/product/stored-advantage/>
2. https://cdn.nrf.com/sites/default/files/2019-01/Consumer%20View%20Winter%202018-2019_0.pdf
3. https://www.smartbrief.com/original/2019/01/3-themes-take-retail%E2%80%99s-big-show-2019?utm_source=brief
4. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/opinion/op-ed-why-im-leaving-neiman-marcus>