Now more than ever retailers need to change in order to thrive. Life after Covid-19 has compounded the need for this change and technology plays a key role in delivering this transformation.

With the need to meet different working practices to ensuring you maintain your customers to attracting spending to providing a personalised customer experience to the need to radically reduce costs retailers need to capitalise on a new world of opportunities with new challenges. Amongst this the store is still a vital element of a retailers strategy, but it more than ever needs to transform and the current marketplace has never been more of a catalyst for businesses to do this.

Bringing technology and strategy together is vital to ensure return on investment (ROI) and return on objectives (ROO) for any transformation programme. As a retailer you are bombarded by new ideas, technology advancements, new trends all telling you how best to service and keep your customers. Before you implement technology for technology sake ensure you take a step back and consider:

What does success look like? Is it to reduce costs and provide better value to your customers? Is it to increase spend each time a customer visits your store? Are you wanting to drive customer loyalty with customers coming back time and time again? Fundamental to all of these objectives is ensuring a customer's shopping experience is enjoyable and as easy as possible whether they are in-store, online or on their phone. But what happens if you choose a technology to enhance the customer experience in one area, but then need to change focus and strategy? Simply, the technology you select needs to be agile and flexible to evolve with your customer and business needs.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMERS

Do you truly understand your customer? Are you making the most of the intel you have? Do you use your store to the best it can be to gather the best intel? Can you harness all the relevant data at store level?

How about your in-store colleagues? are they engaged, informed and excited to work for you and serve your customers?

Customers are fickle and their priorities are effortless service, basically what is in it for me. This coupled with an array of technologies available from click and collect, flexible payments, self-service, and many more as a retailer you need clarity in your objectives – what does your customer want, what will make that customer buy from you, return to buy more etc. Then you can consider what is the ultimate technology game changer to ensure your choices deliver business benefits.

WHERE TO START?

Digital technology is a pivotal enabler for any business transformation strategy - true.

Bricks and mortar remain a crucial element of the consumer journey – true.

eCommerce is vital to your business – true.

Your **customers demand** a seamless omnichannel experience – true.

How can technology unlock the potential to differentiate your brand to not only compete on the high street and online, but thrive?

In an ever-evolving technological world your business is more than likely to have an existing multi-supplier network for delivering IT with legacy systems in place. The question is how does this current infrastructure support your need and desire to drive new digital technology? Are you unsure whether to utilise what you have already or to invest in new? All this is compounded by the need for innovation and speed being essential in today's retail world.

We see it as a digital transformation journey to success. This can be done in stages or implemented as a whole, it is what is right for your business and ultimately your customer. No point implementing a till-less store if your customers don't want to shop this way or understand this mode of shopping. The key is understanding your business, your customers, and your colleagues to deliver a personalised offering that is valued and connects the experience across the store and other digital channels whilst ensuring your investment choices are future-proof and ready to implement in weeks or months, not years.

This guide looks at mapping the customer experience with transformation as the key focus, but at the right points. The differentiator will be how close you can connect with your customer, how agile, scalable and robust your solutions are and whilst remembering to ensure you empower your in-store colleagues.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

The following diagram shows how we at Trust see digital transformation as a journey. The starting point can be anywhere based on where you can deliver the most value to your customer and therefore to your business. From here you can continue on the journey and build, build, build business benefits.

There are many research papers, models, ideas available, the model that we feel brings technology and strategy together is the 'nine elements of digital transformation' as illustrated below. It gives a clear journey for success for retailers.[1]
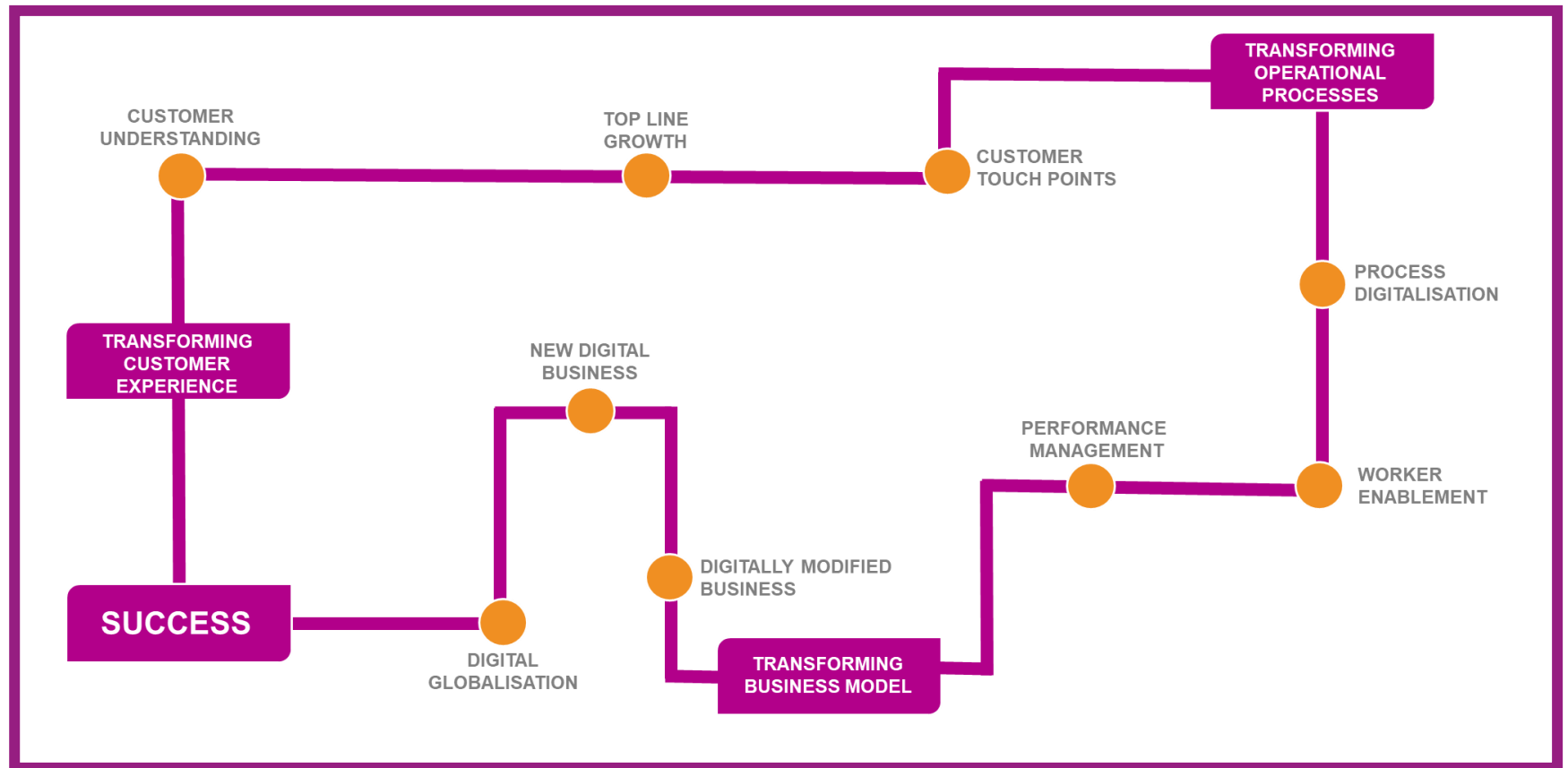
TRANSFORM THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Customer Understanding

Customer knowledge and more importantly understanding helps deliver a **better service**. But there are many ways to deliver this. By giving customers the tools and information you move from robotically serving them to adding value with what they want whether that is guidance, information or independence. This makes selling easy and moves customers to become your **brand ambassadors**.

Dependent on your product/service the following may be relevant for your customers, the point is with the right technology you can support your strategy to deliver one, a combination of these or all of these, whatever is right for your customers:

Guidance: Through technology you can deliver guidance in multiple ways from an information hub in-store and online, to giving in-store colleagues **information at their fingertips**. Helping customers make the right buying decisions by delivering the right level of guidance will **secure a sale**.

Information: Whether this is information about the product, service, stock or customer demographics the right technology can utilise the masses of data that already exists in your business and pull it into an easy to view output. This output can then be interrogated to deliver what your customers want to know e.g. when will it be back in stock? Where they spend time in the store?

Independence: Technology allows your customers independence. Living in a fast paced, on-demand world there are moments when a customer expects the ability to help themselves, quickly and efficiently. Customers range from wanting to interact to wanting to go in and out as quickly as possible. With technology you can **offer them the choice!**

Technology can add **excitement to the customers experience** and help you differentiate and stand out from competitors. Whether this is creating retail theatre through the combination of in-store digital displays and customers personal digital devices. It is important that you have the tools at your disposal to make these work in tandem therefore influence your customers behaviour in real-time. Advertising different things on different mediums will only lead to customers being confused.

Furthermore, an important element of any digital transformation strategy is ensuring in-store colleagues are fully informed and have access to information at their fingertips. This enables them to communicate accurately and personally with your customers. Any customer facing solution must be fully integrated throughout the business bringing together a full omnichannel experience. For example, if a customer wants to buy a product that is not ranged in a store an in-store colleague should be able to offer the customer and complete a transaction to deliver to store, collect from another store, deliver direct to home or to a chosen pick-up location. Going the extra mile for customers in this way will **differentiate you from your competition.**

TRANSFORM THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Customer Touchpoints

All retailers have a mass of data, turning this data into intelligence with technology can deliver better connected customers and in-store colleagues. Getting this right soon saves money, increase sales, enhances efficiency, and elevates your brand to stand out from the crowd ultimately delivering an extraordinary experience. However many of these objectives can feel like demands when you don't have the **right technology**. To avoid being pulled in the wrong direction it is crucial you unravel the key priorities and deliver quickly.

Improving the customer experience starts with your in-store colleagues. Empower your team and make them want to work for you and this will spill out into the service they provide your customers, they will deliver a greater level of service because they have the right tools and are engaged in their work. With pressure to reduce costs and wages you need to think out-side the box. People are driven if they are happy and entrusted to make decisions, question is **do your in-store colleagues have the tools to deliver this?**

Give something to your customers, promotions, special events are all common in today's retail environment. But are you ensuring yours are relevant to your customers. For example, if you have an offer on an animal-based product and send an email to your customer, but they are a vegetarian this creates a view of irrelevance. Having a rules-based CRM that is current will ensure you are relevant and timely. Having location and presence data enables you to promote and interact with your customers whilst they shop, thus leading to more positive outcomes. This level of personalisation can **make the customer feel special.**

TRANSFORM THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Topline Growth

Mechanisms that encourage a customer to enter your store, make a purchase, increase basket size and ultimately ensures your customers return will automatically lead to topline growth. Whether you choose a technology to overlay your enterprise WiFi to promote offers and information to customers personal devices (with or without complimentary digital display media) the technology has to be agile so your communications are relevant and timely. There are many macro influences on shopping trends it is vital to understand your current stock position, competitor pricing to deliver and update promotions in real-time. Relevance is everything.

The use of customer engagement over WiFi in sync with digital displays can really bring your brand to life whilst updating customers with real-time information. How you use digital screens can lead to wowing your customers with engaging visuals and videos, giving them a reason to come back to your store and not your competitors.
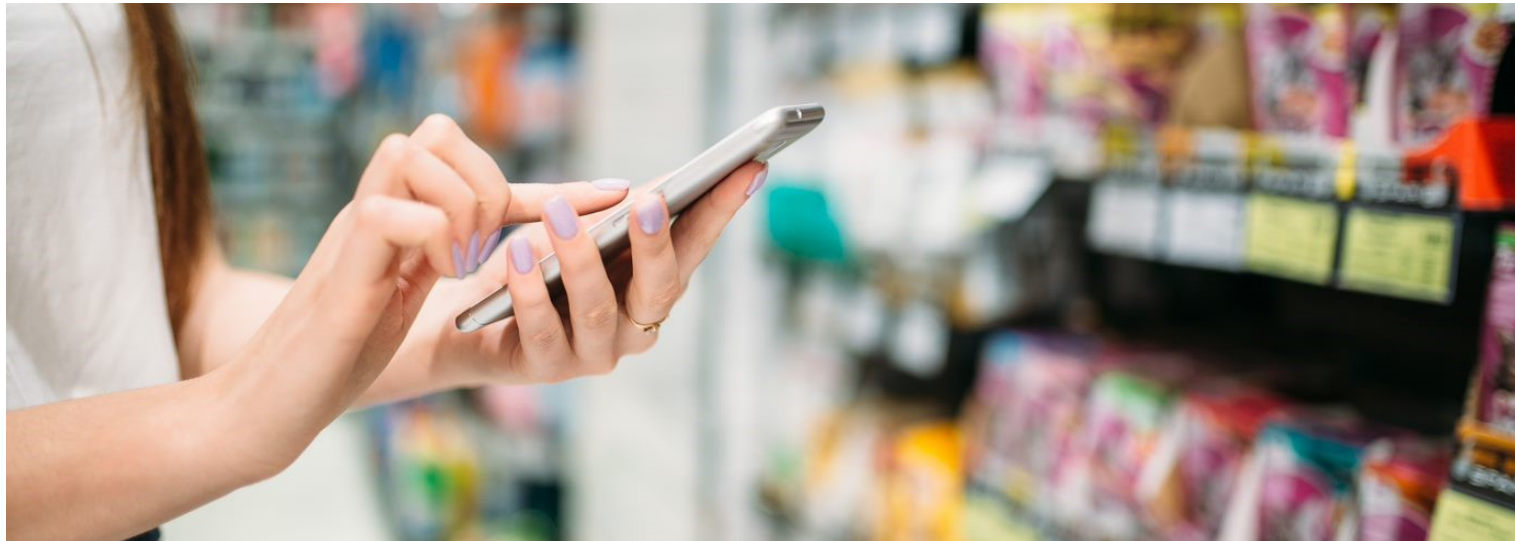
TRANSFORM OPERATIONAL PROCESSES

Process Digitalisation

A majority (61%) of retailers are lagging behind in providing online updates of in-store stock, according to new research. [2] This level of visibility should be simple to provide, right? It is particularly important to mobile and last minute shoppers, as the popularity of omnichannel shopping - incorporating online and bricks and mortar options grows among shoppers of all ages.

A study found that despite the growth of mobile shopping, 73% of consumers still value physical stores for the immediacy of getting a product and not having to wait for delivery. But only 36% of retailers can show stock availability by store, and of those, 18% show exact item quantities by store. Effective stock management is crucial to any retail operations – having the right stock and knowing what stock you have ensures customers have what they want, when they want it – increasing sales and brand value. Digitalising back end processes such as stock management can delivery immense value to a stores bottom line whilst avoiding customer disappointment when items are out-of-stock or simply just not on the shelf. Intuitive stock management can automatically assess your stores performance and analyse stock requirements based on real time sales. Sales are quickly compared to stock levels to generate more accurate replenishment orders. Ensuring the right products are available, based on demand, optimising sales and vastly reducing wastage.

Worker Enablement

Empowering your workforce can deliver many benefits. A happy and engaged workforce creates the best brand ambassadors for your business. By providing your in-store colleagues with the tools to excel in their job you deliver a new way of servicing your customers ensuring consistency across your store real estate. Fully digitalising your store operations will free up your colleagues to serve customers more efficiently and responsively and from anywhere in your store. Your colleagues become the best sales tool you have.

73% OF

CONSUMERS STILL VALUE PHYSICAL STORES

TRANSFORM OPERATIONAL PROCESSES

Performance Management

Keeping up-to-date with store performances, product performance, ensuring the right levels of stock is a continuous task. Digitalising store operations unlocks access to real-time reporting.

Performance in your in-store connectivity is paramount to delivering a digital transformation programme. It is the foundation of how you will connect with your customers and in-store colleagues. Furthermore getting store transformation right will enable other operational efficiencies linking head office, supply chain and regional management operations to true real-time data. Your suppliers could also benefit should they be enabled with personalised data connections checking on inflight promotions, stock availability and pricing.

It is imperative you have the right wired and WiFi network to give you the required adaptability and scalability to underpin and support your digital journey. By utilising cloud-based solutions you can have access in a cost-effective way to cutting edge technology that is also managed. This enables you to reduce upfront and ongoing costs whilst accelerating progress when

transforming your technology. Business performance is enhanced as technology updates and additions are made quick and simple to deploy from a central source. This also takes away expenditure on managing the traditional nuts and bolts of technology to focus on what you know, your business and your customers.

RETAILERS MUST USE TECHNOLOGY TO RADICALLY REDUCE IN-STORE COSTS

TRANSFORM THE BUSINESS MODEL

There is no escaping the need to manage costs and improve performance. Technology can unlock opportunities to take control of your store operations and improve your performance. Vital to any store is their POS and Payment platform. Is your current solution flexible enough to meet the demands of today's environment? How much does it cost you? Is it fully mobile? Does it support the ever-evolving methods of payment?

Traditionally these solutions were based on Microsoft technology, which at times have proven to be costly, inflexible and time consuming to secure and manage. A modern, flexible mobile POS and Payment solution based on Android can deliver vast cost reductions and time savings; whilst enhancing the user and customer experience. It can also revolutionise the way you interact with your customers, enabling consultative and personalised shopping experiences.

HELP YOUR BUSINESS GO FROM SIMPLY SURVIVING TO THRIVING

Digital technology opens the doors to vast opportunities to enhance your business. But with the exciting technology available how do you choose? Choose the technology that will help you stand out by personalising and surprising your customers and empowering your in-store team.

Remember technology is a tool that you should utilise and not something that should restrict you. Keep in mind your customer of today, but choose technology that allows you to move forward to the future needs and requirements of your customers, stores, online business.

Technology plays a vital role in your transformation strategy, with the rise in digital technology, changing consumer expectations and the need to connect with your in-store colleagues to optimise operational performance will ensure your retail business thrives vs survives.

[1] https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-nine-elements-of-digital-transformation/

[2] http://www.retail-systems.com/rs/Retailers_Lag_Behind_With_In_Store_Stock_Data.php