The Future of Retail:
Enabling Experience and Engagement

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The worlds of retail and hospitality are getting more competitive every year, with global brands entering more markets and online competitors fiercely vying for customer attention. Customers are more empowered than ever to demand choice, convenience, and authentic personal engagement from businesses. In a world where consumers are increasingly busy, and time is at a premium, they require businesses to meet their needs in a way that makes their lives easier.

Consumers aren't just buying, but doing their own research, looking up menus, checking inventory, reading reviews and comparing options—gaining more powerful information outside of traditional brand-generated advertising to inform their decisions.

In retail environments, customers want access to pricing information, inventory, reviews, and delivery options. In hospitality locations like restaurants, they want access to menus, nutritional information, and convenient ordering. A 2018 report revealed that 50% of shoppers wanted immersive shopping experiences that respond to them in real-time—including promotions, product information and recommendations, lighting, and sound all tailored to them—without requiring their personal data. Within the next year[1].

It is vital for businesses to be able to engage with customers, learn about them, and use the data from stated and observed preferences to better meet current needs and anticipate how they might change in the future. The ability to cater to preferences and deliver personalized customer service meets the growing consumer demand for convenient purchasing experiences.

To meet future demands, businesses must create exciting and engaging experiences within retail and hospitality environments while also optimizing for convenience. These experiences drive consumer purchases by creating an immersive and engaging journey with a personal touch—a path where associates are highly empowered by technology to meet customer needs.

data and personal information transferred to a machine in-store. Purchases can be connected to loyalty plans or social media, giving retailers access to even more information about customers.

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Some customers want to be in a store and interact with a product before purchasing. In today's retail environment, stores can serve more as showrooms, where the atmosphere and experience can generate future purchases online. Others want to purchase online and pickup in person—increasing demand for space allocated around grocery stores for curbside pickups, or online ordering done ahead for fast casual restaurants that eliminate the need to wait in a line. And still more customers choose online purchases and want choices for delivery.

Predicting the future of the retail and hospitality industries is difficult and inexact. But businesses can anticipate the fast-paced changes to those landscapes by understanding customers through their shopping and purchase behaviors and deploying technology to improve the in-store experience to stay at the cutting edge of customer service.

Businesses that are able to do this have a much better chance of gaining and retaining customers.

Accommodating for Today, Planning for the Future

The future of in-store technology in retail and hospitality means many things to many different businesses. It could mean extensive mobility and expanded self-service to empower customers and speed up transactions, virtual reality to inspire imaginations and entertain customers, or even augmented reality to enhance product customization.

Whatever your vision of the future, it is critical that the technology decision you make today must not only deliver a return on investment, but also be designed with the forethought to adapt to the constant changes to the business landscape and keep

delivering in the long term. Unlike other products, which need to be updated continuously after as little as six months, the HP family of long lifecycle point of sale solutions minimize disruption once implemented, with devices intended to carry retailers years into the future.

Some businesses have decided how they want to implement mobile technology. Others know they want to implement mobile capabilities but haven't quite decided what it will look like. A convertible retail system like the HP Engage Go—which can remain fixed or be undocked by an associate for mobile use—offers businesses the best of both worlds, providing the functionality of a fixed point of sale system with the flexibility of a mobile device. It ensures that no matter how business requirements change in the future, retailers are positioned to be agile and adapt and the technology is there to execute that plan.

In any of these cases, it's best to turn to products that have the flexibility to meet current and future business needs, to stay ahead of the curve and remain competitive for years after implementation. The HP Retail Solutions portfolio—including the Engage One, the Engage Go, and the Engage Flex—is designed with an eye on the needs of the future. These HP devices use the 8th generation Intel® chipset, which is optimized for Windows 10, and modern processors that meet current needs and robust enough to match future processing demands to better serve consumers. Which means that as business needs evolve, and system demands grow, you're already prepared.

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The Future of Customer Service

Customer demands are rapidly evolving, growing over time and expanding to include services that just a few years ago were not a part of how typical or even standout businesses provided service.

Consumers are channel agnostic, combining bricks and clicks, and engage with brands, products and services according to personal preferences. The best-positioned retailers will leverage the latest technology to provide service when and where a customer wants it, and exactly how they want it.

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Leading operators will tailor personal engagements to consumer preferences: whether a customer is browsing in a store, simply picking up an item, or any other situation imaginable.

New, adaptable technology—like the HP Engage Go—also allows the associate to meet customer needs wherever they are in the store, providing a more convenient and engaging experience.

For example, imagine a hotel chain in Manhattan. It's a boutique hotel brand, designed to appeal to a specific segment of traveling customers. In such a space, the ability for an associate to use a mobile device and complete curbside check-in with a guest is highly valuable. It makes the process convenient and personal, putting guests at ease and offering them a unique experience that enhances the brand. That ability to personalize experiences depending on the space and the individual customer desires drives brand perception to previously unavailable levels.

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Harnessing Data for Actionable Output

Businesses can collect more data than ever before using new and developing technologies. Sensors, video cameras and other devices integrated into retail and hospitality environments can be employed to gather data on customer preferences and shopping behavior, track inventory availability, observe traffic flows, or present helpful information based on age or gender demographics. The vast amount of data can be overwhelming, but it's key for businesses in the future to make sense of it turning the data into actionable insights.

Corporate and front-line employees alike, can analyze inventory data, determine the optimal number of employees, and figure out how to appeal to a target demographic for retail sales or determine what cuisines to prioritize for hospitality customers. These functions are particularly suited to the HP Engage Flex product line, which offers high-powered, incredibly reliable edge computing capabilities.

Finally, such insights create a more seamless customer service environment. Instead of customers standing in a section of a home goods store in front of a display of appliances, pressing a customer service button, and hearing a message over a PA system, sensors and analytics tools within a retail space can direct associates to where they are needed and provide them real time information needed to engage the customer and provide meaningful service. This allows for a more personal interaction, and for an associate to help seal the deal in the final purchase decision.

We can't guarantee what the future will look like, but we can foresee some changes on the horizon, like the ever-present need for greater computing power, and the ability to handle increased automation. And along the swift current of future business needs, HP is committed to delivering the technologies that continue to enable business to keep up with consumer demand, delivering a roadmap that helps retailers today and positions them for success in the future.

1. The 2018 Reality of Retail Report: https://www.inreality.com/resources/2018-reality-of-retail-report/
2. The Store of the Future Infographic, 2018: http://elink.hso.com/m/81c4b16c2ea842448592a7455fea7136/D3CA74A4/741681F/082017n

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