



You Can't Always Get What You Want, But When You Apply Knowledge Checks, You Get What You Need

*Do Your In-store Associates Have the Breadth of
Knowledge To Converse Intimately About Your Brand
– Or Are They Just Reading Mobile Prompts?
Quiz Them. Score Them. INCITE Them.
Pivot On Real-Time Feedback. Win.*

Introduction

Welcome to this insightful discussion about retail associate knowledge checks.

Before we dive into the imperative issue of employee knowledge and gauging its depth and value, let's get one assertion out of the way: In-store shopping will never die. The store experience must transform – foremost with highly knowledgeable, customer-facing store associates – but the physical store concept will live on.

Sure, online transactions grow year after year, albeit with miniscule margins for eTailers, but stores are where the customer experience, personalized service, bigger baskets, smarter selling, higher margins and deeper loyalty all take place. Simply Google “the store is not dead” and you'll get plenty of concurring hits.

Perhaps Nikki Baird, managing partner of Retail System Research (RSR) said it best: In her June 28, 2016, blog, titled: [“Stores Aren't Dying –](#)

[Retailers Are Killing Them”](#)¹, Baird declared that pundits who claim the store will never die are correct. “But if retailers keep on believing that this means they have no imperative to change how they think about stores, the role stores play in the shopping experience, the economics of stores, and even more fundamentally, how much transformation is coming to the retail business, of which 90% still does indeed happen in stores,” she wrote, “then stores won't have to die, because retailers' oblivious self-congratulatory ignorance about stores will kill them all off.”

What a wasted opportunity if an associate can't inform, impress, up-sell, cross-sell and incite brand loyalty with a shopper who's clicked off and traveled to your store.

Among the many transformations retailers must make is assuring their associates know more about the products shoppers walk in to consider than the shoppers themselves. That's a big challenge, given the research

PRODUCED BY
mmp
multimediamplus

Robert Guadalupe
SVP of Sales and Marketing
robert@multimediamplus.com

Emily Heintz
VP of Business Development
emily@multimediamplus.com

Lauren Taubes
Director of Business Development
lauren@multimediamplus.com

Website:
www.multimediamplus.com

that tech-savvy consumers bring with them to the store. And what a wasted opportunity if an associate can't inform, impress, up-sell, cross-sell and incite brand loyalty with a shopper who's clicked off and traveled to your store.

That's why this White Paper focuses on embracing, engaging and empowering your retail associates with the breadth of knowledge that allows them to converse intimately about your brand– not simply read prompts from a mobile app built from website data.

Affirming the Urgency of Investing in the Sales Associate



A.T.Kearney

Even though 90% of retail sales still happen within the four walls of a physical store, according to a study by A.T. Kearney, the “real heroes of store operations” – in-store sales associates – “are often overlooked as crucial conduits for improved store performance... Customers say that experience and service have the greatest impact on store productivity. Yet we consistently find that store associates get little investment focus...Almost none of the investments we see today are about helping store associates do their jobs better.”

The A.T. Kearney study, titled: [“Retail Operations: People Are Still the Best Investment”](#)², is based on a survey of 800 North American consumers across demographic backgrounds and more than 100 responses from senior retail executives across the Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific.

The research found that only 38% of consumers

surveyed are highly satisfied with staff knowledge.

Nearly half of retailers responding indicated that employee training programs could be “significantly improved,” the research showed. Nearly all retailers “express concern regarding their workforce’s ability to adapt to a new omnichannel environment. In our opinion, it’s not that retailers have had store associates with poor skill sets, but rather that they have not had the right focus on what it takes to properly support in-store staff.”

Focusing investments on tools and information that enable the employee to better engage with customers and meet true customer needs will remain valuable, according to A.T. Kearney. “Store associates are the most important assets retailers have, and they are central to the future of any store. Investments should focus on the core fundamentals of what it takes to support store associates: training, incentives, career progression, and corporate support to meet expectations.”

The study also indicated that “there is an opportunity to close the information gap regarding in-store customer interactions,” and that 75% of retailers plan to invest in more training and labor. Furthermore, “retailers that are investing in technology successfully are using it to help store associates. It helps ease the burden of execution also, as associates are incentivized to learn, adopt, and implement new technology solutions to boost productivity, sales, and potentially their own commissions.”

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InnovativeRetailTechnologies.com

Erin Harris, editor-in-chief of Innovative Retail Technologies, [recently shared her views](#)³ on the key to customer engagement success: “There’s no question that in retail, turnover’s high and employee training takes time, money, and effort, but it

behooves retailers to invest in their most valuable asset — the associate. From sound hiring practices to the functional yet disruptive technologies that aid them in their role to improve the customer experience, the retail associate is still your strongest link to the customer — even in this modern, digital age of retailing. An informed, personable associate inside the brick-and-mortar store is crucial to the sale. Equip them with technology — and here’s the kicker — that they’re comfortable using, and you’ve set them up for customer engagement success.”

Women’s Wear Daily

[A June 2016 WWD article](#)⁴ highlighted a presentation, titled: “Transforming the Retail Experience,” by Shelley E. Kohan, VP of retail consulting at RetailNext Inc.

One of the primary goals in this transformation, Kohan said, according to WWD, is to better engage the consumer: “Shoppers expect friction-free shopping,” Kohan explained. “They expect.... knowledgeable sales associates. And they desire an experience. And they also expect engagement.”

Kohan pointed to the “knowledge deficiency gap” that exists on the sales floor, according to WWD. This is when a consumer has spent time researching a product or category and as a result knows more than the sales associate. The result is a soured shopping experience for the consumer.

There is a knowledge chasm and a need for training, indicated WWD. And since many retailers are now using iPads on the sales floor, which often include an employee portal, scheduling tools and payment solutions, “Why not include a training app?” Kohan said in the WWD report, adding that it is important to build a “strategic framework” when store-level insights are discovered.

Mindtree

Another recent study based on interviews with 600 North American shoppers found that a sales associate’s interaction with shoppers has a significant influence on the purchase decisions for high-involvement products. The report, issued June 2016 by Mindtree, a digital transformation and technology

services firm, found that approximately 70% of high-involvement product shoppers interact with the sales associate during the trip when they make such as purchase. This reflects on the fact that sales associates are aiding in the purchase, said Mindtree.

A gap exists in terms of the training technologies that associates would like to leverage, but “few brands have capitalized on this need.”

Mindtree

The Mindtree report, titled: [“Sales Associates Play Pivotal Role in the Shopper Purchase Journey”](#)⁵, also showed that the level of interaction with sales associates varied across product categories: “For example, we found that shoppers who purchase from specialty, electronics and consumer goods stores tend to interact more with the sales associates than in other categories. In sports equipment, automotive, consumer electronics and home décor, we found that more than 80% shoppers find the need to interact with sales associates. This indicates that high-touch products call for an increased engagement with sales associates, while general merchandise ...tends to need less engagement.”



Image Credit: Mindtree, “Sales Associates Play Pivotal Role in the Shopper Purchase Journey”

In its [press release announcing the study](#)⁶, which also surveyed 100 employees from companies spanning five retail segments, Mindtree shared these key findings:

- Shoppers who interact with a sales associate are 43% more likely to purchase a product, and their transactions have 81% more value, compared to those who don’t interact with an associate. In addition, they are 12% more likely to revisit the store.

-91% of sales associates strongly agree that positive interactions with shoppers result in higher conversions, yet 94% feel this requires more advanced technology tools and training that they currently can't access.

The survey identified a gap that exists in terms of the training technologies that associates would like to leverage, but "few brands have capitalized on this need," said Mindtree.

Excellent Mobile-based Training Technologies Available

Though Mindtree asserted that few brands employ tools specifically designed to train and communicate with their sales associates, several technology platforms currently on the market do a terrific job of putting relevant data into the hands of associates.

For example, three excellent associate learning and engagement tools available to the retail industry include Sales Assist from IBM, the Store Associate app from Tulip Retail and [INCITE](#)⁷ from Multimedia Plus. While the former two simply display information to an associate, INCITE is fundamentally different in that it ties information to knowledge checks and real-time data for field managers. In fact, the INCITE communications and learning solution is so unique that its release established the new category of training and communications: Mobile Associate Communications Platform (**mACP**). Among its unique attributes, the app-based, interactive INCITE tool allows retailers to conduct knowledge checks not only of training but corporate communications information forwarded to each associate. Both the **mACP** category and INCITE provide the last-mile solution to educating, informing, evaluating and empowering customer-facing employees and mark a major shift in how single iPad users can interact with superior retail training and corporate communications.

OK, so given the importance of creating and supporting knowledgeable sales associates, let's take a closer look at the value of knowledge checks.

Frequent Knowledge Checks Boost Learning

Quizzes and tests are not particularly popular among the people taking them. Some schoolchildren, their parents and retail associates alike often argue about "not testing well," "that's too much scrutiny," "I'm not a robot" or "testing makes me nervous." Meanwhile, widespread studies show the intrinsic value of assessing how much learning has taken place, if at all, and how much knowledge was retained.

In fact, some training technology platforms insist that retailers don't need to measure workers individually, because results will be seen in across-the-board metrics. But how can retailers be proactive in assuring each associate is growing and producing if they don't even know if their expensive payroll dedicated to training programs impacted each employee successfully, or even was accessed?

If you're spending thousands if not millions of dollars on payroll for associate training, don't you want to know whether employees engaged with the content, and if it paid off? Knowledge checks – or tests in the form of short quizzes on information presented – provide the feedback mechanism that tells communicators and field managers that the information was not only clicked on by the associate, but understood.

["Retailers will always lose space, not because they are retailers, but because they are bad merchants."](#)⁸

Matt Lounge, SVP, DDR Corp., a shopping center owner and manager

Only with knowledge checks can field managers access the real-time feedback they need to assess program ROI, identify areas of associate improvement, reward successes and perhaps reevaluate training, communications and other retailing strategies.

An article in Scientific American, titled: ["Researchers Find That Frequent Tests Can Boost Learning"](#)⁹, stated: "Research in cognitive science and psychology shows that testing, done right, can be an effective way to learn. Taking tests can produce better recall of facts and a deeper understanding than an education devoid of exams....Taking tests, as well as engaging in well-designed activities before and after tests, can

produce better recall of facts — and deeper and more complex understanding—than an education without exams... We think of tests as a kind of dipstick that we insert into a student’s [or associate’s] head, an indicator that tells us how high the level of knowledge has risen in there—when in fact, every time a student [or associate] calls up knowledge from memory, that memory changes. Its mental representation becomes stronger, more stable and more accessible.”

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Bersin by Deloitte, a division of Deloitte advisory services, delivers research-based people strategies designed to help leaders drive exceptional business performance. In its recent report, titled: [Global Human Capital Trends 2016](#)¹⁰, the company talked about engagement efforts, which for the purposes of this White Paper equates to retail associate training and engagement tools.

“Is your engagement effort ‘always on?’” Bersin posed. “Perhaps the biggest challenge...in leading engagement programs is shifting from a transactional, once-a-year mind-set, to an “always on,” continuous listening [or knowledge checks] approach to monitoring engagement. Engagement is not reactive but proactive. Efforts to build engagement should be ‘always on’ through extensive data use and analysis by business leaders [including VPs of store operations, and district and field managers]. Leading companies have made this their goal and are reaping the benefits; all organizations that want a passionate workforce should follow suit.”

So if you’re engaging and quizzing, engaging and quizzing – all in real time – you’ll get what you want and need to improve the customer experience.

mACP Fills the Void in Education and Evaluation

Consider how the Internet changed how people shop. And how mobile changed how shoppers interact with retailers. Now the nimble and sophisticated new Mobile Associate Communication Platform – **mACP** – has changed how retailers educate, inform and evaluate their most powerful and expensive asset: Their in-store associates.



Advances that shaped the new **mACP** category – including real-time knowledge checks and their related KPIs – at last fill the gaping void in how retailers can prepare associates for today’s fast-paced, digitally-influenced in-store selling environment. With these advances, retailers finally can empower customer-facing employees to create the personalized retail engagement and experiences that only the physical store can provide.

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At the core of **mACP** is INCITE, the next-gen version of the QuizScore app already in used by dozens of retailers.

INCITE was developed from industry trends and feedback from retailers representing some of the most popular fashion and lifestyle brands worldwide, and is vigorously optimized for mobile deployment. The tool works as a private broadcast network between regional, district and field managers and their sales associates and provides information and analytics via a dashboard interface delivered on a highly secure,

PCI-compliant SaaS-based platform.

The next-gen INCITE app also includes a Publisher tool, allowing corporate administrators to publish content including videos, PDFs, JPGs and HTML5 files directly to iPads – then monitor results. Imagine filming the VP of Stores discussing new brand features or competition, and providing it to all stores just minutes later, with full tracking!

INCITE's training and communications content is automatically and seamlessly distributed to employees based on geographic location and function. A highly branded – not merely a logo in the corner – experiential interface resonates with associates and allows them to engage in relevant training that reflects the company's unique culture, while driving business goals.

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Where are the ongoing, day-to-day updates and offensive skill-building and brand strategies required in today's fast-paced world of in-store retail? Right here, with INCITE and the **mACP** category it created.

Leverage KPIs: Objective Measurements of Associate Performance

Vital KPIs help determine how well a corporate initiative and/or associate is performing, based on product, brand, promotion, inventory, up-sell, cross-sell and the competition, for example – and INCITE delivers them.

Did the associate receive the relevant corporate communications? Did he or she engage with and apply the information? Was the approach effective for that associate, this store or that region? This is where the ability to pivot on real-time feedback becomes essential.

Regional, district and field managers can answer questions such as these with live, cloud-based data streams of associates' communication and training receipt, completion rate, knowledge checks and scores. When comparing this data with in-store sales and engagement results, store operations managers have instant visibility into the KPIs each associate was able to impact — where and when it counted. Now managers have individualized, meaningful and decisive information for rewarding, correcting and enhancing the experience provided at each store – and improving bottom line results.

A mobile performance platform that exposes and documents key store metrics not only helps retailers determine how in-store programs and participation are impacting KPIs, but provides a global deployment tool for maintaining and tracking key communications.

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For senior executives, INCITE's "OpInsight Report" highlights the top and bottom few regions and districts. In fact, INCITE's real-time metrics are so targeted to the district, store, employee and question levels that some high-profile retailers are using these KPIs to change their compensation models.

Custom data reports also tie metrics into other key retail results: For example, training and communications KPIs can be correlated to other retail data such as secret shopper scores, employee turnover, a product's sales, average daily sales, units per transaction and more. Real-time data metrics also can indicate if in-store merchandising strategies are effective, and if not, instantaneously they can be switched out and reevaluated.

Without knowledge checks, few of these actionable KPIs may be revealed and leveraged.

Bandwidth Issues? No problem!

On-demand mobile video learning and other

communications delivered to associates on the sales floor, in between customer time, has changed the game in retail associate education and evaluation. Until Multimedia Plus broke the barrier, effective non-streaming video training could not be delivered into the hands an iPad-equipped associate. By definition of its patent, the app-based, instant-on video content cannot be obtained from any other retail service industry vendor.

INCITE's app-based, non-streaming training video modules – instant-on, like a light switch, since the content resides in the app, not the network – immediately deliver training and communications to the hands of every associate. These smooth, high-quality video and large multimedia files are available on iPads – even in stores with low bandwidth: This is a key benefit, since even retailers with a higher bandwidth often reserve it for mission-critical activities such as credit card transactions. In addition, upgrading bandwidth, especially in a decentralized company, significantly increases operating costs.

Video has been known to “enhance the ways in which learners are able to access, absorb, interpret, process and use information” and is “quickly becoming essential for both on-demand and mobile learning because it is flexible, self-governed and self-sustained,” stated a Bersin by Deloitte study, titled “[Using Video to Impact Learning Initiatives](#)”¹¹. “On-demand videos allow learners to consume knowledge that is personalized, highly accessible and rapidly applied to their work effort.” Furthermore, “video learning is here to stay. Make your plans now for how best to leverage this essential learning tool and make it an integral part of your organization's blended learning offerings.”

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Bersin by Deloitte

When associates leverage engaging and interactive video to enhance how they “absorb, interpret,

process and use information,” it goes to reason that subsequent training knowledge checks, which only INCITE provides, will reveal significantly higher scores across the retail enterprise, resulting in improved customer experiences and greater ROI.

INCITE allows you to embrace, engage and empower your retail associates with the breadth of knowledge that allows them to converse intimately about your brand– not simply read prompts from a mobile app built from website data.



Keep on Keepin' On

Retail associates continuously must keep on training and honing their skills with engaging, on-floor, immersive content – and constantly be kept abreast of competitive factors; product introductions; new up-selling and cross-sell opportunities; problem-solving techniques; professional and management development; the latest corporate announcements; and other communications. Instantly an employee's receipt of these communications must be verifiable, and their achievements as well as areas for improvement identified, based on real-time metrics.

Only with a sophisticated, mobile-first training and communications platform, complete with essential knowledge checks, can retailers best infuse their stores with well-trained, empowered and knowledgeable associates that impact the bottom line.

To learn more about how YOU can WIN by quizzing, scoring, INCITE-ing and creating highly knowledgeable in-store associates, please contact Multimedia Plus at info@multimediamplus.com or 212-982-3229. We're friendly, intelligent retail professionals ready to show you how you can get what you want – AND what you need.



Footnotes:

- 1 http://www.rsrresearch.com/research/stores-aren-t-dying-retailers-are-killing-them?utm_medium=email&utm_source=RPW-6-28-16&utm_campaign=RPW_6_28_16
- 2 https://www.atearney.com/cs/issue-papers-perspectives/-/asset_publisher/dVxv4Hz2h8bS/content/id/8152687
- 3 <http://www.innovativeretailtechnologies.com/doc/the-key-to-customer-engagement-success-0001>
- 4 <http://wwd.com/retail-news/trends-analysis/retailnext-consumr-shopping-experience-10464225/>
- 5 http://possible.mindtree.com/rs/574-LHH-431/images/Mindtree%20Shopper%20Survey%20Report.pdf?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTkRFRMU9UQTRNamMyWm1NeSIsInQiOiJ2Tk1YV3dcL0ZhVldGMzRCT3lBbVlreitFOHNOa3BLaHR6YSsxR1J2RDVYYjM1N3NUZEkwNzZtdGM0TzRFThhKXC-9MQkdxUUUxQVNkRTRUNXAyeWpZV2VoeHI2WkQ1ejZcL3U0VjhqSk5aQ0VwUT0ifQ%3D%3D
- 6 <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/sales-associates-play-pivotal-role-in-the-shopper-purchase-journey-new-mindtree-study-583791671.html>
- 7 <http://www.multimediaplus.com/#video>
- 8 <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-05-25/shopping-center-owners-say-stores-to-live-on-despite-retail-woes>
- 9 <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/researchers-find-that-frequent-tests-can-boost-learning/>
- 10 <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/HumanCapital/gx-dup-global-human-capital-trends-2016.pdf>
- 11 <https://www.bersin.com/Practice/Detail.aspx?id=16993>