Darts can go anywhere but lasers only go where you aim them\(^1\). So don’t throw darts with your technology dollars when laser-precision, in-store solutions can expertly target improved store performance – starting with your customer-facing associates – your most valuable and expensive asset.

Consider these darts: Bells and whistles with limited ROI such as magic mirrors, beacons and oversized tablets which initially impress consumers but diminish the role of the associate. They’re the antithesis of a well-trained, digitally equipped associate who can educate, up-sell, cross-sell, personalize and advance the shopping experience for in-store consumers. With new laser precision app-based learning technologies, you can teach, quiz, measure and improve associate performance – and thus store results – and communicate to and from store and field personnel faster than ever before. These next-generation mobile and instant-on video training tools defibrillate store performance and ROI – without additional payroll dollars – for dozens of the nation’s best-known retailers\(^2\).

“In our opinion, it’s not that retailers have had store associates with poor skills, but rather that they have not had the right focus on what it takes to properly support in-store staff.”

A.T. Kearney

“Amid the noise of technology investment and omnichannel integration, store associates are often overlooked as crucial conduits for improved store performance,” states A.T. Kearney in its recent study, titled: “Retail Operations: People Are Still the Best Investment\(^3\).” The report indicates that while technology is “the number one retail investment today, there’s limited visibility on the returns on those investments.” The study points out that nearly every retailer responding to the survey (more than 100 senior retail executives) will invest in technology during 2016, “yet 60% say their company struggles with executing and measuring its ROI.”

This is a “new era of store operations,” according to the report. However,
“why are retailers continuing year after year to toss money at technology in an effort to chase after the next big thing in retail, yet coming up short?”

The answer lies with the focus of these investments, the study indicated. It also reveals that “90% of retail sales still happen within the four walls of a physical store. Yet almost none of the investments we see today are about helping store associates do their jobs better. Instead, most focus on consumer-facing technology, even though 80% of consumers say they experience poor service when directly interacting with in-store technology…Focusing investments on tools and information that enable the employee to better engage with customers and meet true customer needs will remain valuable.”

Retailers successfully investing in technology “are using it to help store associates,” A.T. Kearney further notes. “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.”

“Amid the noise of technology investment and omnichannel integration, store associates are often overlooked as crucial conduits for improved store performance…Retailers that are investing in technology successfully are using it to help store associates.”

A.T. Kearney

Associates: The Unsung Heroes of Retail
This same A.T. Kearney report considers store associates to be “the unsung heroes of retail.” The survey shows that “customers say that experience and service have the greatest impact on store productivity. Yet we consistently find that store associates get little investment focus…In our opinion, it’s not that retailers have had store associates with poor skills, but rather that they have not had the right focus on what it takes to properly support in-store staff.”

INCITE*, a Laser-focused Store Operations Technology
As more retailers embrace their associates as “crucial conduits for improved store performance,” they recognize the significant value of laser-precise learning tools and their proven ROI for supporting, training, empowering and advancing associates across the entire chain – with speed and engaging continuity.

In response, a new Mobile Associate Communications Platform (mACP) category for training and developing retail associate talent has materialized. At its core is the INCITE* mobile app training platform, a people- and mobile-first PC, Mac, iPad and tablet solution which marks a major shift in professional development and mobile enterprise communications.

INCITE* is a highly branded, private broadcast network that instantly and seamlessly distributes app-based video training modules and communications to employees based on geographic location and function. It allows granular targeting of workers and provides real-time metrics to field and corporate managers. New content can be added in minutes and delivered to associates across the chain, or to a highly-focused group of users based on title, region, completion rates and more.

One of the major differentiators of this unique broadcast network is its instant-on, non-streaming video technology – specifically designed to be mobile-first. Regardless of onsite bandwidth, interactive video modules pop up quickly, like turning on a light switch. On-floor associates interact with short, two-minute, custom-tailored learning programs delivered instantly to their devices, in between customer time - and without leaving the selling floor. Subsequent quizzes on the information digested provide real-time metrics to field and corporate managers and help identify opportunities for improvement, thereby bringing a new level of ROI to on-floor retail training.
“More than three quarters (86%) of retail executives report that training their workforce has become more important, with 41 percent stating it is significantly more important today.”

Accenture

INCITE® also features an integrated Publisher tool that allows field and corporate administrators to publish content, including PDFs, JPGs, HTML5 and other media files, to associates’ mobile devices, then monitor engagement results. Talk about a savings in paper hardcopies!

Nothing makes more sense than a fast, interactive mobile training and communications app – one vigorously optimized for mobile deployment and consistently hits the bulls-eye in efficient associate training and store performance, and with measurable ROI.

Cross-channel Shoppers Need More from Store Associates

As online shopping continues to grow, along with consumers’ demand for seamless cross-channel shopping experiences, retailers must train, engage and equip store associates to satisfy that demand. In-store associates able to make smart recommendations and help a consumer see them and as well as shop them online, help build the relationships that increase sales.

The 2016 Omnichannel Retail Associate Study from Salesfloor surveyed 500 North American consumers about their online and in-store shopping habits.

The report, titled From Clicks to Bricks: Omnichannel Customers Expect More from Stores, found that:

- 84% of shoppers seek out help or recommendations from sales associates.
- 53% want the option to shop online with a sales associate.
- 58% say it would be helpful to see those recommendations and insights online.
- 87% of shoppers are more likely to buy an item recommended from a sales associate, “uncovering a direct correlation between associate recommendations and sales,” according to the report.
- 77% are more likely to make a purchase from a sales associate who has helped them previously, making it clear that “recommendations and relationships play an influential role in driving retail sales.”
By helping associates connect with shoppers online, "retailers can build relationships at scale while providing a consistent shopping experience for all customers, on all platforms," Salesfloor stated. "Retail sales associates are the driving force behind the personalized service shoppers receive in-store to encourage purchases and foster relationships."

**New Direct-to-Consumer Model Shortens Learning and Communications Fuse**

The window for quickly and efficiently empowering in-store associates has narrowed: The industry's new direct-to-consumer "see now, buy now" strategy underscores the need for lightning-fast training and information access. This new operating model allows digital consumers to buy styles directly from the runway, without waiting months for them to appear in stores. In fact, these same runway styles also become available on-line and in-store immediately following the show – so training and communicating with associates at laser velocity has become even more essential. Bare Minerals, Burberry, Michael Kors, Ralph Lauren, Tiffany & Co., Tom Ford and now Tommy Hilfiger are among the leading brands first adopting this new direct-to-consumer operating model.

"Aside from communicating instantly with field associates about runway styles to be released for digital purchase, retailers embracing this new operating model quickly see elevated traffic in their stores, where associates must be trained and ready to answer questions and provide a smart, streamlined experience for fast-paced shoppers," says David Harouche, founder, CEO and CTO of Multimedia Plus.

Speed is a core value of a private, powerful app-based broadcast network that unites all content into one digital format and delivers it instantly across the enterprise. Imagine a video of your CEO or VP of Operations discussing the newest runway style features – or other pertinent, time-sensitive communications – provided to all employees in just minutes, with full tracking of who received the video – and who watched it.

**Continuous Learning**

An overarching goal of targeted associate training and communications technology is to create a "liquid workforce," one that is continually trained to remain highly adaptable, ready for change. Laser-precision, in-store mobile training solutions provide quick, interactive, continuous learning that creates this adaptability.

"To support a liquid workforce, retailers need to develop continuous learning capabilities, which may include accessing third-party digital education resources," according to an Accenture report, titled: "People First in Digital Retail, Accenture Tech Vision for Retail 2016." The report emphasizes that "delivering on-demand training in short bursts via mobile devices or tablets is [an option] to upskill employees who are on the clock, while saving training dollars for retailers. This is especially true for in-store sales representatives and seasonal workers, who need access to people-first training apps that are designed to deliver quick and easy technical education."
Adhere to Expert Recommendations
If you’re confronting the noise of available retail technologies but do understand that your customer-facing store associates – your most valuable and expensive asset – are “crucial conduits for improved store performance,” then stop throwing darts with your investment dollars. Instead, adhere to expert recommendations and consider piloting a new tool and training module that efficiently delivers to your workforce.

Bypass the many technology bells and whistles that don’t move the needle on ROI. Focus on a laser-precision, in-store solution that teaches, quizzes and empowers customer-facing associates; measures results; and identifies opportunities for improvement to expertly target improved store performance.

May we suggest the sophisticated yet simple-to-control INCITE® training and communications solution from Multimedia Plus?

Here’s a Snapshot of some of our dozens of clients, many among the nation’s best-known retailers:

If you’re ready to get started, or have any initial questions, please us at 212-982-3229 or info@multimediaplus.com or. We promise no hard sell – just great, laser-focused solutions.

Footnotes: