

## Almost two thirds of retailers now operate four or more customer touch points: new survey

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Results of a new survey of retailers have shown that channel integration is proving increasingly difficult as more and more retailers turn multi-channel.

The study by eDigitalResearch and Portaltech Reply found that just 34% of the retailers polled felt their current customer touch points were well integrated, compared to 48% two years earlier.



The figure contrasts with the current market context, where 63% of retailers operate across four or more customer touch points, up 20% compared to the previous year.

The results reveal that existing technology systems are the key barrier to a coherent and innovative multi-channel customer experience, with 65% of retailers stating that their current technology systems make creating a seamless multi-channel customer experience challenging.

Furthermore, half of those surveyed said they were either 'not aware' or 'not aware at all' of how many visits a customer makes across their channels before making a purchase decision.

Now in its third year, the survey reveals that retailers expect their digital channels to generate more and more customer visits over the coming two years as the popularity of smartphones, tablets, smart televisions and even smart watches continue to grow with shoppers.

The study also found that 34% of the retailers surveyed felt that their websites required the most support to improve the customer experience, followed by stores (29%) and mobile channels (17%). Almost half (48%) of those polled said they were also prioritising digital integration to their established store presence to help improve their overall multi-channel customer experience, as well as generate more revenue from an increase in the number of purchases.

Riccardo Lodigiani, chief executive of Portaltech Reply in the UK, said: "Retailers need one view of customers, products and inventory, whether they've purchased in-store or browsed online. Customers want an integrated retail experience across all channels.

"This research demonstrates that there are too few retailers closing the ever-widening gap between online and offline channels, meaning they are losing touch with their customers and falling behind

on market share. Creating a consistent experience across physical and digital touch points is essential to really putting the customer at the heart of the business. Retailers must make this a priority for 2014."

Derek Eccleston, commercial director at eDigitalResearch, added: "Whilst the majority of retailers that we surveyed felt like they didn't have a good understanding of their own customer's purchase journeys, they did believe that they had a solid understanding of changing consumer behaviour.

"They've come to recognise what is expected of them from multichannel customers. With that in mind, brands and businesses are increasingly putting the overall customer experience at the heart of what they do to help them stand head and shoulders above their competition. Partners and suppliers therefore need to be developing solutions and systems that work seamlessly with existing technology across channels to help retailers provide shoppers with the kind of experience that will breed loyalty, repeat purchases and offer a real return on investment."

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