

Why Retail Teams Need Real-Time Communication and How to Achieve it



Whether you realize it or not, communication at work makes an immeasurable impact on your team and, by extension, your customers. But effective communication doesn't just fall into place. You have to take deliberate steps to work towards achieving and then maintaining it.

Although you may not readily see the ways in which its absence has hurt your bottom line, you can probably imagine how much more successful your company might be if you concentrated more on establishing effective skills on the floor of your retail business. Let's investigate how you can enhance your skills set by placing communication at the forefront of your business.



1.

The Tools You Need

Without the right equipment in place, you will find optimizing your productivity — and therefore your team’s capability for collaboration and customer service — to be much more difficult. To make your transition into a more streamlined and effectively functioning team smoother, here are some tools you should consider.



Zapier: With more than 1,000 app integrations, Zapier’s easy setup and wide variety of customizations make it a compelling solution. Just design a streamlined process, and Zapier will automatically run these actions for you. If you’re curious to look into it, free trials are available for you to discover its impact for yourself.



When I Work: Want a single solution for all your scheduling needs? With this app, you can manage your time cards and have all the data available anytime. This will boost your team’s accountability, increasing the accessibility of your time and attendance information. And these services are available free of charge.



Voxer: Our own Voxer takes the concept of traditional walkie talkies into the modern era. Your team won’t need to deal with bulky, outdated devices any longer. Instead, you can transmit voice, text, photos and even video with Voxer. You can record voice messages live and save them for later, so that nothing is ever missed.



Vend: You know how essential it is to have a reliable point-of-sale solution to track sales, manage inventory, generate reports and foster customer loyalty. Whether your business works in-store, online or in a mobile-optimized environment, you can try its integrated payment module, clear dashboard and intuitive functionality for free.



Trello: This popular project management software boasts a distinctive design using cards and columns that is perfect for managing multiple projects. Organize your projects

or various elements of your business so that you never lose track of your progress. You can try out its sophisticated interface for free right now.

2.

Why is Internal Communication Specifically Vital in Retail?

Communication is the absolute foundation of any relationship. So it stands to reason that communication on the job is something that every successful company needs from the very beginning. The bond you share with your employees and the customer experience you deliver depends on it. And in a fast-paced retail environment, it may be even more vital. If you don't have a tool in place to manage your communication, you're doomed to issues that will decimate your bottom line.

But it doesn't need to be that way.

With a solid trustworthy, easy to use communication solution in your corner, you can prevent disaster from striking your team and your customers. Retail sales employees have enough on their plates tending to customers and maintaining the store. Investing in a reliable system is one expense that should you feel confident in, as it creates a trickle-down effect that elevates your entire operation.

If you don't yet have a reliable and effective solution in place, there's no reason to panic. In the current age of technology, there's no excuse for relying on outdated tech to get the job done. Effective workplace communication means the difference between a company that operates like a well-oiled machine and one that barely scrapes by without a catastrophic incident.

So how do you improve your current situation? By making it a priority. Saying you put customers first and actually doing it are two vastly different things. When you protect your team's ability to stay in touch, you're most certainly committed to the latter. To make your goals even clearer, we'll investigate the difference communication makes on your business and some creative ways to improve it.

3.

Ever Thought About Using a Secret Shopper?

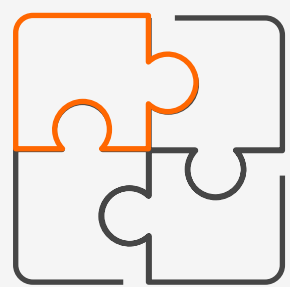
You may have heard the term bandied about, but do you know what secret shoppers — also known as mystery shoppers — are all about or how they might benefit your business?

Usually hired by either a market research firm (often one that specializes in secret shopping) or directly by a manufacturer, these individuals are tasked with paying a scheduled visit to a retail store under the guise of a regular customer. These assignments are performed completely unbeknownst to the store's workers and often include a specific series of objectives.

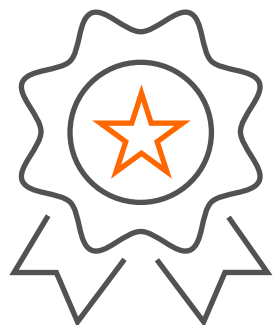
Secret shoppers may be asked to order or purchase specific items, to casually inspect store displays, note prices, observe the level of customer service provided and other elements of their shopping experience. Then the secret shopper completes a thorough questionnaire detailing his or her visit to the establishment, data which is shared with management.

Business managers like you receive actionable data that you can use to recognize dedicated employees, discipline those who aren't meeting expectations and even rework elements of your training and customer service programs. Secret shopping may emerge as an integral part of your growth strategy, since you can gauge the effectiveness of specific initiatives.

Here's a quick rundown of how a secret shopper can positively impact your business:



You will be able to evaluate employee performance, cluing you into which workers are really pulling their weight. This is especially valuable if the communication between you and your employees has broken down and needs to be restored somehow.



You will be able to inspect the entire process with an objective perspective in place. Use secret shoppers to monitor the state of your facilities and analyze the quality of your product or service.



You will be able to focus on necessary improvements that you otherwise would have never discovered. The data you receive can help you plot out an entire course of action to get your service standards up to where they should be.



You will be able to better foster your customer relationships, since you'll be more informed of the effect of your current processes. With a secret shopper, you can reopen the lines of communication between yourself and your customers.



You will be able to collectively motivate your team, offering an incentive for your workers to keep pushing forward with delivering quality customer service. Transparency is key to effective communication, and secret shopper data instills a sense of community.

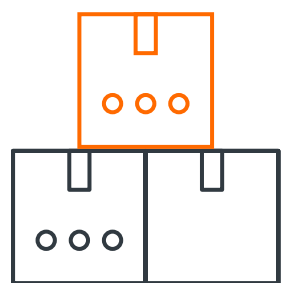
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Retail Challenges that Await You

We've already discussed why internal communication is such an integral part of your business. But, if you haven't yet taken action to remedy this, then allow us to examine a bit more thoroughly some of the **challenges that would be solved by implementing a smoother more streamlined internal process.**



Management: Imagine trying to assign tasks to your workers or reaching out with pertinent questions about a particular project, only to find yourself without a response. If you can't depend on your system to actively communicate with your team, there's no point in even having one in place. Without a tool on your side, your role as a manager becomes infinitely more difficult, and you cannot stay on target with any assigned projects.



Inventory: Your own business development and budget hinge on you knowing how much inventory you have in stock, what you have available for sale and how much you've sold thus far in a given year. You need a way to not only update these numbers but communicate effectively from one team member to the next to ensure that you are all on the same page. A miscalculation in your inventory may prove disastrous for your business.



Scheduling: Last-minute schedule changes happen all the time. An employee might need to suddenly take time off or decide to switch shifts with a co-worker, and you need a communication tool in place to track these exchanges. Do yourself a favor and minimize the confusion over scheduling by making in-house communication a priority. Your workers will certainly appreciate the transparency involved in having a record of all scheduling exchanges.



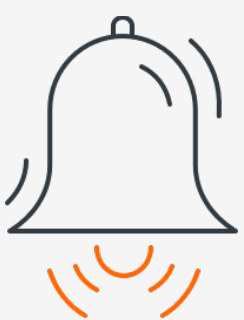
Projects: When you or a team member is in the midst of a project, how do you let the rest of your team know? If you don't have a definitive answer for that, then you probably want to readdress how your operation flows. You should have a system in place to manage projects, letting everyone know what has been done and when. What shape that takes is up to you, but imagine how much easier it would be to keep your productivity up if everyone knows the current status of your day-to-day workload.



Customer service: How you interact with customers is an integral part of your business. And you need to be sure that you're on top of their needs. Miscommunication, missed messages and delayed responses can wreak havoc on your ability to tend to customer needs in a timely manner. So don't be surprised if you run into these recurrent issues without a solid communication tool on your side. After all, your customers are your company's greatest asset.



Budget: Without proper records covering how much you have on hand and how you've been spending it, you're going to feel the pain eventually. How this manifests itself will be an unwelcome surprise though. In any case, your team needs to be able to consult each other to ensure that the budget restrictions are continually kept top of mind. How else can you hope to save money and push yourself towards increased profitability? Don't let budgetary concerns slip through the cracks.



Emergencies: Due to the unpredictability of the retail space, you need to retain the ability to leap into action at a moment's notice. Whether there's a snafu regarding a customer or a back-end task that somehow went bad, emergencies do happen no matter how well you plan. You need to be able to reach your team and get someone to attend to the situation without hesitation and without leading to additional confusion.



Tools: Getting a communication system you can depend on may mean upgrading what you have in place. Many communication devices can be costly — eating into your aforementioned budget — or bulky and therefore difficult to lug around. Worse yet, they may not be outfitted with the capabilities you need. Now's the perfect time to evaluate your outdated walkie talkies and consider switching it up with a more modern solution that can make your workflow easier and more effective to manage.

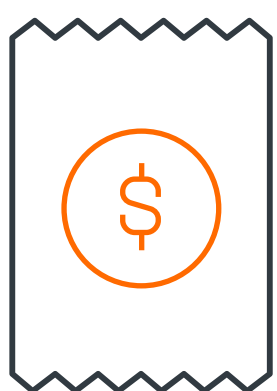
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The Effects of Poor Internal Team Communication

Being able to effectively communicate amongst your team and with customers is invaluable, but sometimes you need to **first recognize what happens when poor communication is in play**. Consider these scenarios and how a solid communication system may have prevented them.



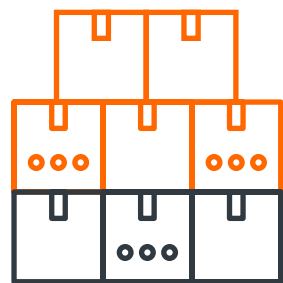
Damaged product: You do your best to take good care of your products, but every once in a while, something can go wrong, leaving your products damaged. Most distressingly of all, this — in nearly all cases — occurs due to a situation that could have been easily avoided. If you had a reliable communication system in place, you could have avoided this altogether. But, as it stands, your business will likely end up having to endure the lost profits that the damaged products would have brought you.



Returns: No retail manager ever wants to face a customer returning products back for a refund. How you handle these, of course, will differ greatly based on whether your business conducts sales online or in a brick-and-mortar location. The more finesse you use in these situations, the better chance you'll be able to retain that given customer's patronage going forward. Alternatively, the worst message you can send is to offer a delayed response or never tending to the customer at all.



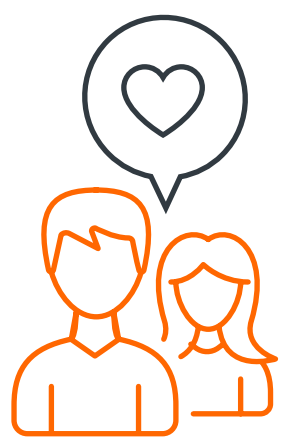
Dressing room assistance: If your retail operation deals in selling clothes, you almost certainly have at least one dressing room on the premises. How you and your team coordinate assisting customers in this part of your store is absolutely imperative. Whether the customer is waiting outside the dressing room or is already in the dressing room, you're dealing with a customer who is particularly vulnerable and is waiting on your team to allow them to continue shopping.



Restocking: Without enough products on your shelves, you set yourself up for the unfortunate situation of having customers but not enough products to sell them. To prevent this, you need a communication system in which you and your team can ensure that items are restocked on schedule. It may involve a number of departments from within your business, but if it isn't completed on time, your customers will just take their business elsewhere, all because your restocking habits have proven unreliable.



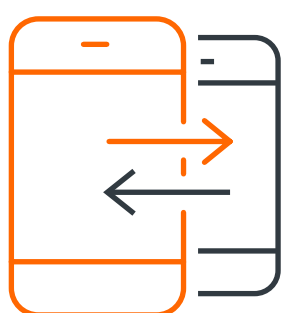
Sales event: Black Friday, tax-free days, holidays and flash sales provide opportunities for you to connect with customers and greatly boost your sales numbers. But you need to coordinate with your team across all departments to get your store or site ready for the incoming rush of customers. That takes, as you may have guessed, an outstanding communication to keep every task moving forward. Otherwise, you will encounter misunderstandings and errors that will jeopardize your sales prospects.



Customer service: To keep customers coming back for more, you need to ensure that you're providing a level of service that will entice them to buy your products again and again in the future. To do so with everything else that goes into running a retail operation can be a major challenge, but with the right device on your side, you can coordinate this with relative ease. The most important thing to achieve with your customers is to make sure they feel listened to and made a priority.



Employee retention: While you're considering how your communication system is tailored to the customer experience, don't forget to also include your team members. If you have a system in place that is unreliable, this will affect your employees' morale. They'll be frustrated, have to deal with irate customers and get berated for not tending to certain tasks sooner. If you want to hold on to your workers and prevent them from searching for less hectic work elsewhere, address your communication tool ASAP.



Technology: Your tools can limit you in a variety of ways, and if you're still working with outdated technology like walkie talkies, your business is far, far behind the times. Once you've gotten a taste of what more modern solutions can do, you'll never go back to your old processes and will finally be able to enjoy the benefits that most of your competitors are already using to stay ahead of the market, deliver quality service and ensure that their team collaboration is first-rate.

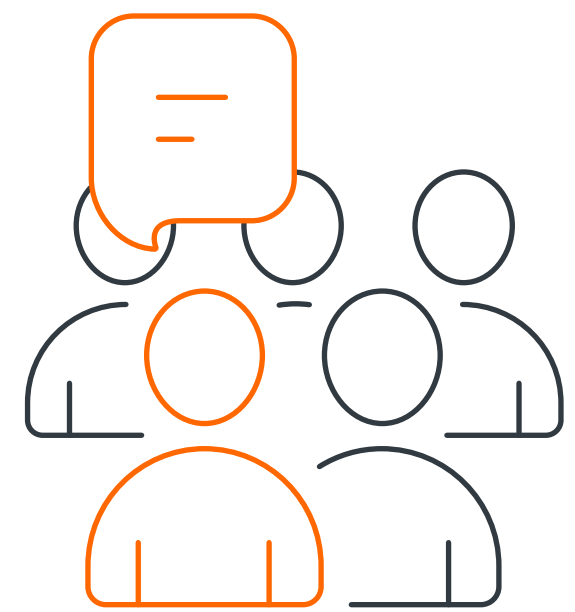
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Managing Your Retail Employees

Running your retail business can be stressful. **But it really makes a huge difference if you know exactly how to make the most of your team.** Let's discuss a few tips to more effectively manage your employees.

Involve them in the process:

Ask your workers for their thoughts on your products or processes, and publicly acknowledge their contribution when it makes sense to do so. Immediately you're building a relationship of respect, trust and collaboration that will make your team feel proud of what they've accomplished and motivate them to continue onward. It also helps to incorporate a bit of mentoring into your role as manager. If you can't do this yourself, then pair your workers off.

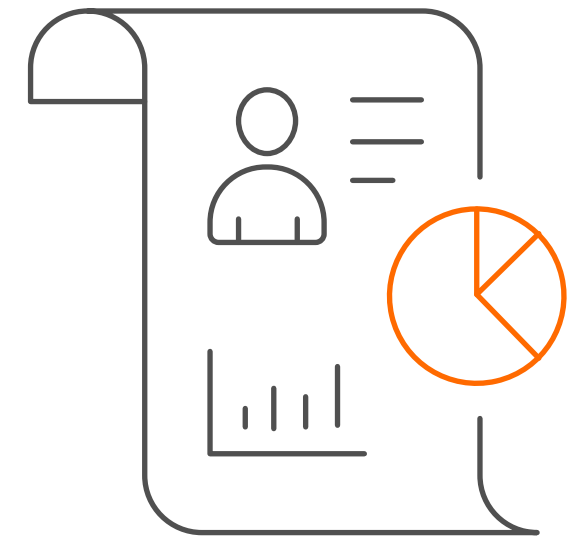


Position yourself as team leader:

Remember that leading a team and being a leader are two very different things. While you need to hold your team accountable, you need to also give them the space to get the work done. Communicate the standards you're expecting from your team so that self-management is central to your management philosophy. Every one of your workers brings his or her own distinct personality and skill set. You'll be amazed at the doors that will open when you leverage the unique qualities each worker can bring to your business.

Invest in the tools you need:

You may be wondering how employing technology amounts to a substantial upgrade with respect to your team. Such solutions consolidate, expedite and otherwise optimize everything from payroll and scheduling to inventory management and order processing.



Adapt when necessary:

The market is always changing, and as a manager, you need to be willing to switch it up too. Learn to know when something just isn't working and be flexible, especially if you expect your team members to. You don't want to close yourself off to any opportunities to do better, many of which will come directly from your team.

Pay attention, and you'll likely come to your own conclusions about how best to handle managing your business. *Just as the people you work with may develop or change their responses, you must be ready to allow your business to evolve just the same.*

7.

Voxer Business

We understand that running a retail business is an arduous task. To keep you, and your employees, on an upward trajectory, you must be willing to evaluate your systems and explore alternative approaches that might yield a better return on your investment.

Try Voxer Free for 14 Days