



TEA MILK

ATM



STAY AWHILE

Grab and go? More like sit and relax. Behold the new reality of c-store retailing P. 34

Customers hang out in the c-store section of Totally Tommy, which also includes a Tim Hortons.

Focus the Field Team Away from Inboxes



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Retailers' field teams are inundated with e-mail. The average field employee receives hundreds (if not thousands) of messages each week that request information about the company's location, provide direction for store-level activities and ask for input on chainwide initiatives. The time required to keep up with e-mail inevitably distracts field employees from customer-facing responsibilities. But new enterprise tools are reducing the clutter in field teams' inboxes and enabling the team to refocus on their customers.

Don't get me wrong: Email as a communication mechanism has brought a lot to the table. For 30 years, the phone has had a digital ally—a buddy to take on some of the heavy lifting of mass communication in long form. Email is flexible. It's familiar. And it's easy. But like the phone, email has limitations, particularly in business, and especially when business means providing an experience that keeps consumers personally engaged.

Store-Level Support

Because email is instantaneous, it's often used within retail chains to disseminate information about a critical or important issue. For example, a store manager who is having issues with a malfunctioning point-of-sale (POS) machine might react by reporting issues to the director of operations, information technology (IT) support manager and area manager. Each of these individuals might see the email immediately and begin to respond. But it's not uncommon for each recipient to begin his or her own email thread, with new recipients asked to respond. Suddenly, resources from IT, operations and accounting are put to work on parallel efforts. Even worse, the people on

the various threads in this example have had limited visibility into the issue, and may have no knowledge at all of other stores with the same problem. The seamless customer experience of payment is now in jeopardy because of this web of emails.

Using a Web-based system designed to communicate problems or issues from the store—and resolution plans internally—has advantages over trying to adapt email to this specific POS issue example. The most obvious is increasing visibility—not only within the issue, to all of the participants, but also across all issues and stores.

Using integrated reports and filters to view single or multiple issues at once (and in detail) not only enables your organization to properly diagnose, plan and resolve singular occurrences, but it also identifies systemic issues while providing improved

employee engagement and productivity. Field employees are the front line of your brand; engaged field employees will provide better customer service.

Store-Level Information

Store data is also often requested from the field via email. There are two problems inherent in the "email database" this creates: First, visibility is limited even further to store managers and field personnel with access to "the inbox"; and second, collating hundreds of responses into anything useful is a time-consuming and error-prone process.

New tools refine task management and remove tasks from the inbox.

Deploying an actual Web-based database makes the data more accessible and creates a shared knowledge asset composed of the most accurate, up-to-date store-profile data, allowing retail managers in every department to execute flawlessly, get to market faster, better understand the store experience and focus on customers. Store profiling tools enable retailers to send out survey data requests and compile answers in a centralized database. This site intelligence platform can also provide real-time reporting that a head office manager would have to manually create if he or she were compiling it from email.

Store-Level Execution

For the field team, inbox-driven task management has many of the same challenges as both "bottom-up" and "top-down" communication.

Because the inbox is a "holding area" for all sorts of messages, task-oriented requests can easily be missed or misfiled, fall off the radar, get pushed to the bottom of the screen by more recent messages, or worse: become completely unmanageable across store distribution from the standpoint of completion tracking.

New tools are emerging that refine task management and remove tasks from the inbox. This technology ties goals and objectives—and meaningful measurements—to tasks. A built-in awareness of calendars and location provide more automated follow-up and accountability tracking, which saves retail operations managers time because they no longer have to search through email and follow up and measure their team's performance.

The field teams will enjoy substantial time savings as well, generated as much by process improvement as increased freedom from the ever-changing inbox. That time, of course, can be spent connecting with their top priority: the customer.

Engaged field employees will provide better **CUSTOMER SERVICE.**