

## How Retailers Can Benefit From Digitally Empowering Frontline Workers

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*Credit: Getty Images by visualsplace*

By John Keating

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of frontline workers in many industries — especially retail. These employees currently account for 80 percent of the global workforce. Yet, 60 percent of them are unsatisfied with the technology they've been provided with to do their work.

Digital transformation is essential as businesses strategize for a strong "return to normal" post-pandemic. Retailers can realize several positive externalities by connecting and communicating with workers where they're at — on the go with their smartphones.

### Improved Collaboration

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Retail employees often operate in a silo and are disconnected from their team members. This can cause misalignment and affect productivity and performance throughout the organization. Even when supervisors are equipped with walkie-talkies, this technology is clunky, disruptive and unreliable. Frontline employees can easily collaborate and receive critical information when they can utilize their smartphones. Rather than having to physically track down colleagues or radio for assistance, workers on the floor using a mobile employee app can instantly send/receive requests, check shift schedules, and access all documents and information necessary to do their jobs.

Personal devices give business leaders a direct line to their frontline workers. With a mobile workplace app, managers can publicly recognize exceptional employees, which has been proven to boost talent retention. Leaders can also arm their employees with knowledge surrounding the company and its strategies. When workers are provided context and understand why certain decisions are made, they're more invested in their role.

For multilingual workforces, smartphones can bridge the language gap by using inline translation software to make communications, training materials and safety updates more accessible to everyone. With immediate access to the latest SOPs and product information, retail employees are able to provide a higher level of customer service and answer questions instantly, rather than seeking out other team members to address concerns or

locate product and stock information. For franchises, company leadership can communicate critical information and receive direct feedback from multiple locations in one single digital hub.

Related story: [6 Steps Grocers Can Take to Empower Their Frontline Workers With Technology](#)

## **Streamlining Internal Processes**

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Frontline roles often involve redundant manual processes that can be streamlined with technology. When personal devices are used for work, productivity can increase by 34 percent — and employees save about 81 minutes each week as a result. These time savings are critical for retailers' bottom lines. Reports indicate that digitally empowered employees drive up to 21 percent greater profitability to their organizations.

Standard internal procedures can benefit from digitization as well. Fully connected employees can make HR requests and schedule time off directly from one mobile workplace app. Organizational checklists and forms can be standardized as well. When an employee submits documentation to their manager electronically, both parties are able to view and revisit this information whenever necessary.

Mobile technology can also reduce health and safety hazards — such as wet floors, COVID-related regulatory changes, stockroom issues — by offering instantaneous updates even across multiple store locations or departments. The U.S. government recently introduced COVID mandates requiring employers with over 100 workers to ensure their employees have received the vaccine or test for the virus weekly. Noncompliant businesses could face thousands of dollars in fines and penalties. Verifying vaccination status or test results regularly is only possible with proper technology implementation.

## **Leverage Existing Investments**

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Personal device usage can extend existing company investments in technology. Those expenditures can be leveraged directly by employees on their mobile devices. For example, HRIS functions can be accessible from smartphones, allowing employees to review or provide information instantaneously. Employees can also check benefits and rewards for which they're eligible, such as healthcare, dental, 401K matching and more. Benefits alone account for nearly 40 percent of total employee compensation, yet many programs have severely low participation rates, mainly due to the lack of visibility and accessibility of these programs.

Companies that have invested in workforce management systems can still utilize these existing structures while adopting mobile technology. Rather than filing a paper request with HR or calling a supervisor, digitally empowered frontline workers can trade shifts,

view available shifts, and pick up shifts with ease. Supplying employees with proper digital tools will only bring them closer to existing investments made by the organization.

Technology is a key component in attracting and retaining top talent. For frontline companies struggling to fill open roles after massive rounds of layoffs and resignations due to the pandemic, digital tools can be a valuable resource for recruiting and engagement strategies. Employee engagement begins with the hiring process and persists throughout the individual's time with the company. Mobile and digital communication strategies allow business owners to check key metrics and catch early signs of low morale, and can improve the employee experience by simplifying operational tasks.

Giving essential workers equal access to the tools they need helps them be more engaged with their roles and more connected to the organization as a whole. Satisfied employees ultimately lead to a better experience for customers and a better return on investment for the business as a whole. Incorporating mobile workplace technology can help support key processes, drive business agility, create a safer workplace, and allow workers to be more productive and autonomous.

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