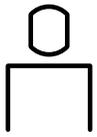




# The Future of Unified Commerce

## Key findings



### Customer expectations

82%

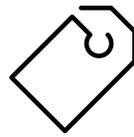
shopped and reviewed products online and then purchased the item in the store

66%

would choose a store that offers same day delivery over a store that doesn't offer it

87%

are interested in a personalized and consistent experience across all shopping channels



### Retailer opportunities

59%

are focused on creating a consistent brand experience across channels

32%

offer same day delivery but 44% of these indicate the process needs improvement

28%

currently offer the ability to "start the sale anywhere, finish the sale anywhere" to their customers

## Accelerated retail, escalated expectations

While traditional brick-and-mortar retailers started evolving their digital and mobile commerce capabilities over the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many of them to accelerate their IT roadmaps. Newer, “nice-to-have” services such as buy online, pick up in-store (BOPIS), curbside pickup, food delivery, contactless payment and self-checkout have since become must-haves for commerce under social distancing.

The rapid adoption of these services has also accelerated customer expectations, as consumers now have more shopping options than ever. Consumers demand the ability to shop wherever, however and whenever they want. For the retailer, this makes selling even more complicated.

## Navigating the cross-channel shopping trip

Consumers start and end their shopping journeys in different channels—and frequently shop for the same product across different retailers via mobile, online or in-store. The path to purchase also varies by consumer and type of product being purchased. In a recent Windstream consumer study, 87% were interested in a personalized and consistent experience across all shopping channels.

The ability to easily cross channels as they research, shop and purchase is important, as 82% of consumers have shopped online or on mobile and then purchased in the store (webrooming), while 56% have shopped a store and then purchased online or via mobile (showrooming).

Customers expect a frictionless shopping experience across an entire brand—they don’t want disruptions as they cross individual channels or locations before they arrive at checkout with their online shopping carts. And while this data was collected pre-pandemic, it stands to reason that this expectation is even more urgent now.



of consumers are interested in a personalized and consistent experience across all shopping channels.

The same study revealed that retailers' top unified commerce priorities are to create a consistent brand experience across channels (59%) by improving their online experience (52%), improving personalization (45%), and improving their mobile shopping experience (41%). Retailers realize that their online experience is a big part of a customer's shopping experience. Delivering on customer expectations means not only improving what customers see, but also everything behind the scenes that is required to provide a seamless experience across all channels.

## Supporting all shopping spaces with Unified Commerce

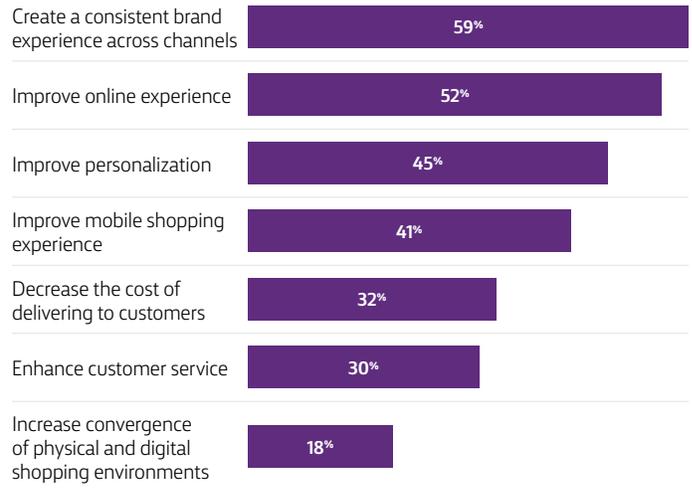
The research collected demonstrates that retailers are starting to embrace unified commerce as the best way to overcome the traditional silos around individual channels and bridge the physical and digital worlds. In most cases, a personalized customer experience combined with visibility into real-time inventory data is the key way to differentiate a brand and drive customer loyalty.

It starts with developing a comprehensive customer journey map to identify all of the touch points and influence points in a shopper's buying journey, with a focus on the key decision points, or "moments of truth." With a keen understanding of the ideal customer journey, a retailer can then design systems and processes to support a customer experience that is seamless and frictionless.

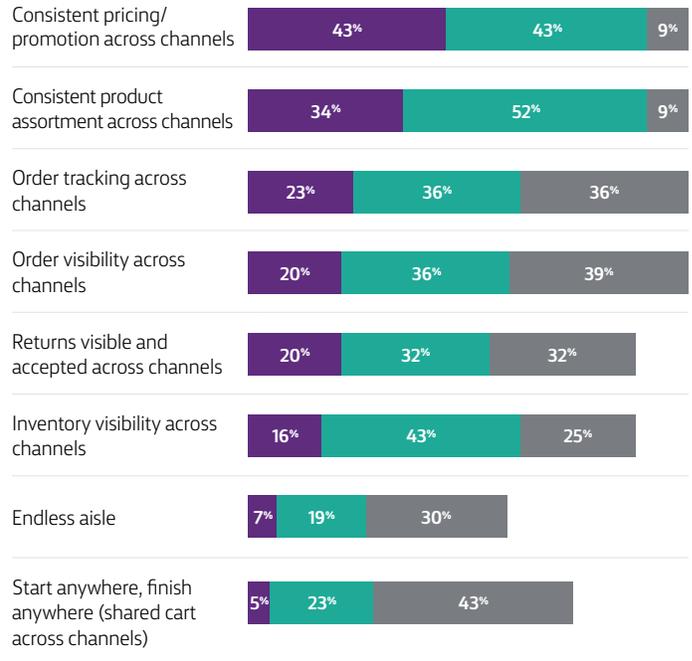
We continue to see progress made as retailers implement cross-channel capabilities such as consistent promotions, product assortments and order visibility across channels. But the number of implementations that need improvement, especially in light of the recent shutdowns caused by a global pandemic, is still very high. In fact, the accelerated adoption of these capabilities likely exposed an increased need for improvement across industries.

While currently only 5% of retailers are successfully offering a "start the sale anywhere, finish the sale anywhere" capability, it is promising that within two years 71% plan to offer this to consumers. A complete unified commerce model that supports a single, shared shopping cart across channels with the customer is imperative to offering start anywhere, finish anywhere capabilities.

### TOP UNIFIED COMMERCE PRIORITIES



### CROSS-CHANNEL CAPABILITIES



■ IMPLEMENTED AND WORKING WELL  
■ IMPLEMENTED BUT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT  
■ IMPLEMENT WITHIN 2 YEARS

# Fulfillment across channels

Fulfillment is also a critical element of unified commerce. This process encompasses everything from receiving products to storing merchandise to shipping it to the customer on a timely basis.

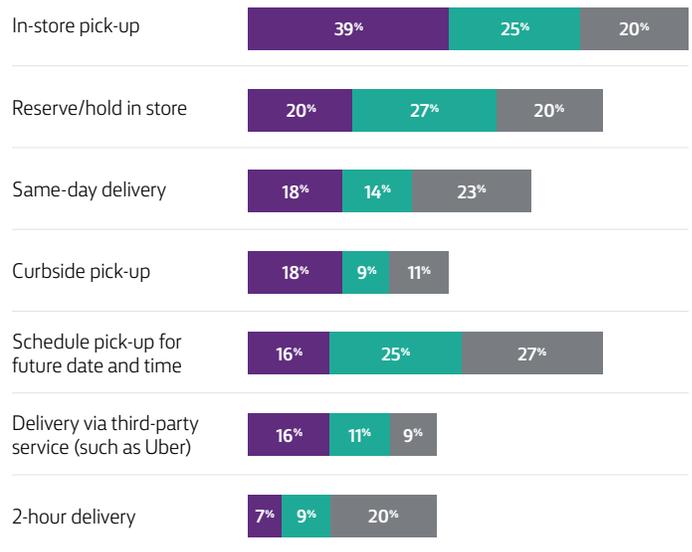
Customers expect immediate gratification, with same-day delivery quickly becoming the norm—Amazon Prime’s shift from a two-day delivery program to a one-day program for example. Buy online, pick up in-store (BOPIS) is just an interim step as retailers work towards the goal of same-day delivery, as 55% of retailers plan to offer this within two years. Delivery via a third-party service, such as Uber, is also gaining momentum with 36% of retailers planning to offer it within two years.

Retailers realize they need to enhance their fulfillment process, as 32% of retailers indicate that decreasing the cost of delivering to customers is one of their top unified commerce priorities—and many are planning to offer additional pick-up and delivery options for their customers.

Retailers continue to look at different ways to offer customers the flexibility to find, purchase and receive their goods how and when they want. Of the retailers surveyed, 66% have implemented the ability for customers to buy in-store and ship the product to their home, but nearly half of these indicate the process needs improvement.

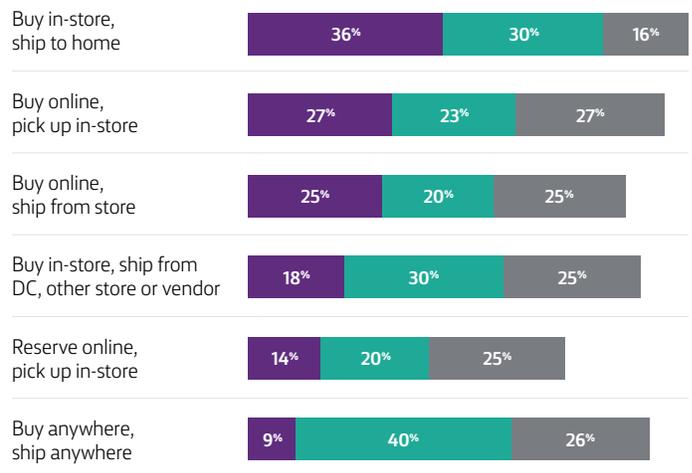
The COVID-19 pandemic certainly thrust the “buy online, ship from store” option into the spotlight. Not only did it allow non-essential businesses to use dormant inventory in stores to fulfil online orders, but it was an effective risk management option in case of an outbreak caused a shutdown of a fulfillment center.

## OMNI-CHANNEL DELIVERY



■ IMPLEMENTED AND WORKING WELL  
■ IMPLEMENTED BUT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT  
■ IMPLEMENT WITHIN 2 YEARS

## FULFILLMENT OPTIONS



■ IMPLEMENTED AND WORKING WELL  
■ IMPLEMENTED BUT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT  
■ IMPLEMENT WITHIN 2 YEARS

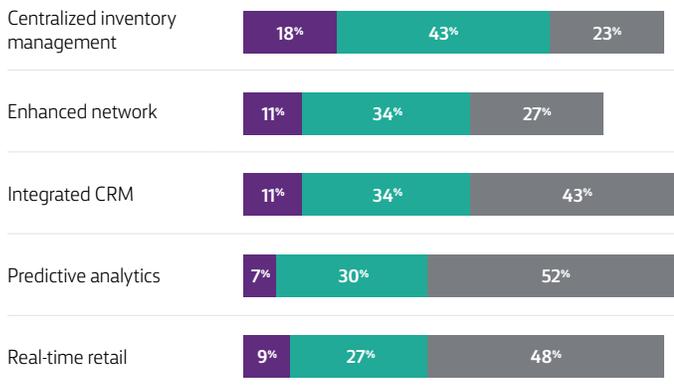
# The need for a single commerce platform

While many retailers have started to offer services that emulate the shopping environment customers expect, a lot of those omni-channel capabilities are cobbled together using manual processes and disparate systems that don't work in real time. This cumbersome, error-prone environment makes the case for retailers to adopt a single unified commerce platform.

A well-designed and provisioned unified commerce platform supports all customer touch points and channels, simplifies integration and provides real-time visibility—enabling a unified view of customers, inventory and fulfillment. It becomes the single consolidation point for transactions, inventory, pricing, order management, CRM, customer care and more.

Centralized inventory visibility, an enhanced network and integrated CRM are all significant considerations, with nearly three-quarters of retailers focused on these elements in their unified commerce plans over the next two years.

## UNIFIED COMMERCE INITIATIVES



- IMPLEMENTED AND WORKING WELL
- IMPLEMENTED BUT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
- IMPLEMENT WITHIN 2 YEARS

This platform provides a single version of the truth across all channels to enable transparency for inventory, product and customer information. By moving the heart of the transaction, merchandising and fulfillment activities to a centralized platform, retailers allow their digital commerce applications to be more innovative and agile—and contribute to the personalized, ubiquitous and seamless experience customers expect.



of retailers offer consistent pricing/promotions across channels but half of these need improvement.

# Unified Commerce platform capabilities

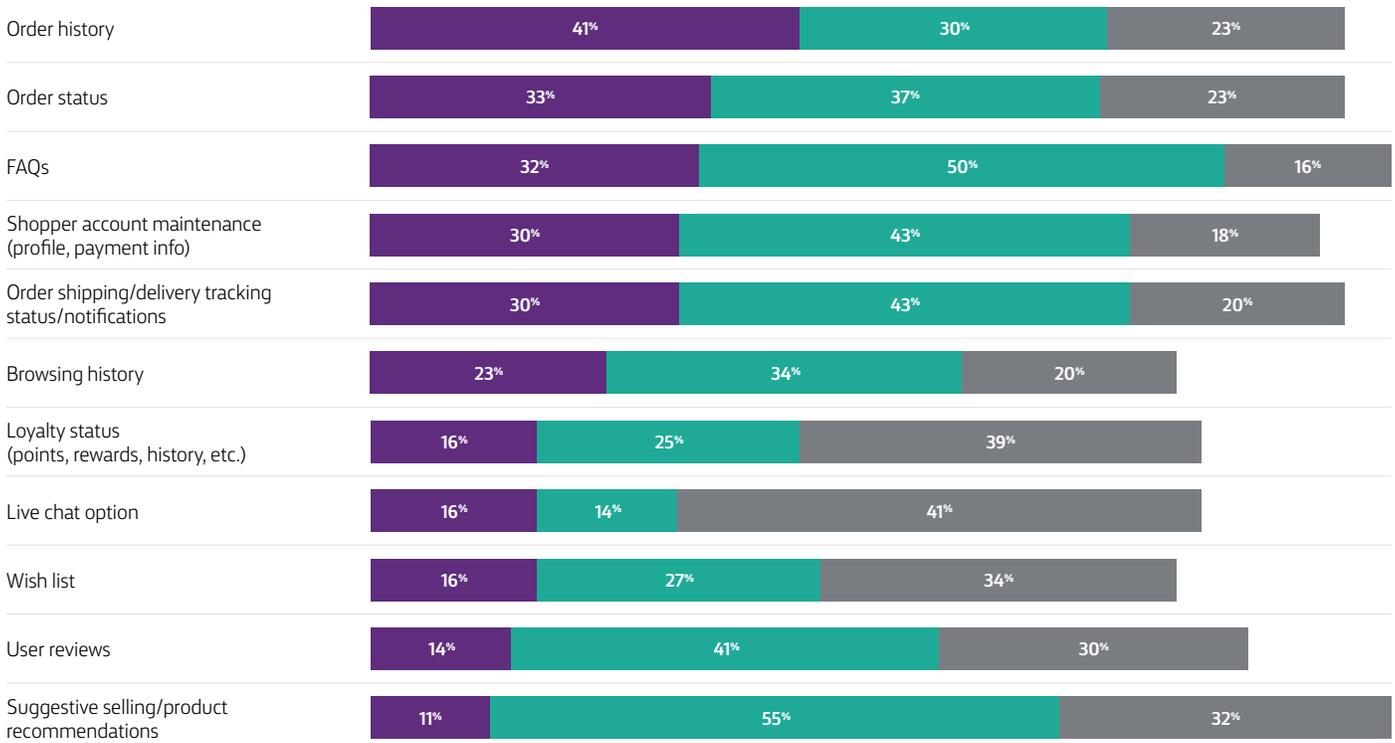
Since consumers use digital devices throughout the shopping journey to research product information, compare prices and read consumer reviews, providing as much relevant information via the retailer’s website helps keep customers loyal to the brand.

We asked forward-looking retailers what capabilities they have on their unified commerce site to help customers research, review and purchase products. Here’s how they responded.

- + **FAQs** were the most popular with 82% of retailers offering it, although more than half indicate this area needs improvement.
- + **Shopper account info and order tracking** were the next most popular offerings with 73% of respondents featuring this on their e-commerce site—although in both cases, 59% of retailers indicate these areas need improvement on their website.

- + **Product reviews and consumer photos** of products is also influential content when shoppers make online purchase decisions.
- + **Live chat** is a feature that is on the radar of many retailers. Only 30% of retailers currently offer live chat, however, another 41% plan to offer it within two years.
- + **Suggestive selling/product recommendations** is a great opportunity to support further mobilization of retail and drive incremental sales. Two-thirds of the survey respondents currently offer suggestive selling/product recommendations, however, 83% of these retailers indicate the features need improvement.
- + **Wish lists**, along with suggestive selling and browsing history, need to be available and consistent from one device to the next, across channels and in the hands of in-store associates so customers have a seamless shopping experience.

## E-COMMERCE CAPABILITIES



■ IMPLEMENTED AND WORKING WELL  
■ IMPLEMENTED BUT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT  
■ IMPLEMENT WITHIN 2 YEARS

# The art of artificial intelligence

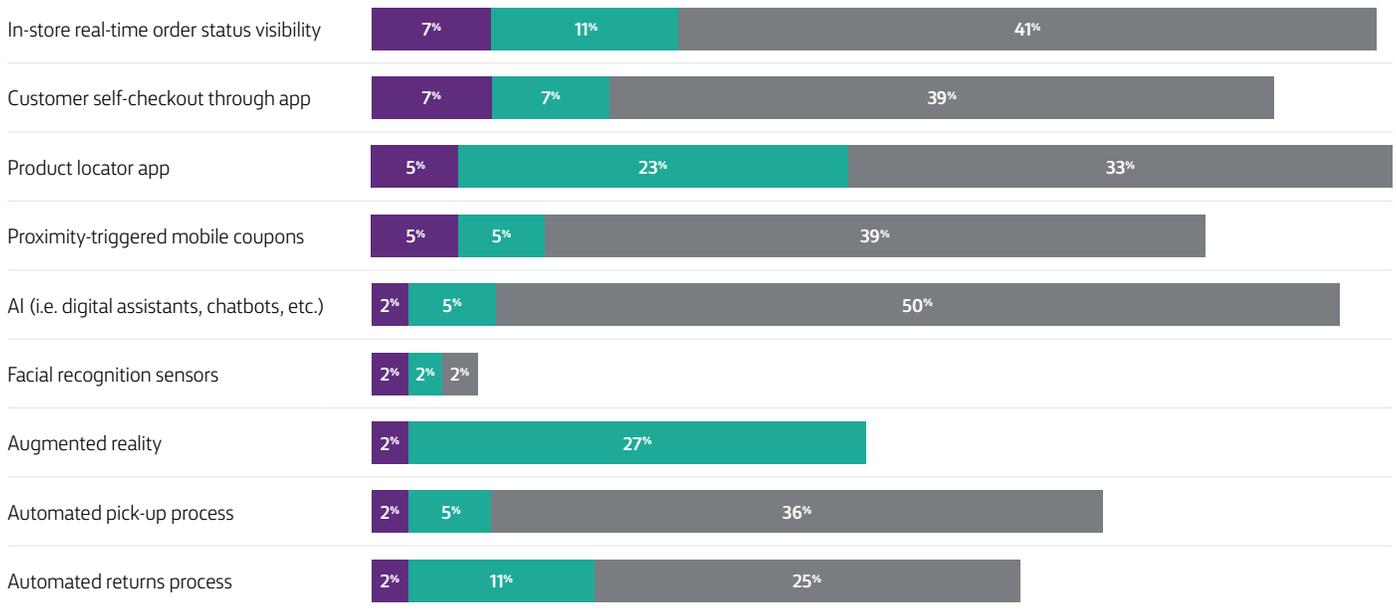
With the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), retailers can now reach a much larger group of consumers on a personal level. Many retailers are looking at using AI to improve the customer experience with leading retailers seeking to exceed the AI experience in other segments.

As AI-powered personalization (i.e. voice assistant technologies like Siri, Alexa and Google Assistant) become mainstream, we see chatbots increasingly replacing traditional human customer service. Many customers are comfortable with this replacement—some may even perceive human interaction as less efficient than artificial intelligence. While some retailers may find that human interaction within the shopping experience is too important to move completely to AI, there is no denying that AI is having a big effect on the retail industry.

Retailers can use AI to pinpoint the most convenient time of day to reach out to consumers with products they would be willing to purchase based on past clicks and website traffic data. Amazon and other multi-channel retailers are currently experimenting with AI to offer purchasing suggestions based on answers to a series of questions and past purchase history. AI offers the ability to exploit the vast amounts of customer preference and transaction data gathered to personalize the customer experience.

According to BRP’s findings, more retailers will be venturing into this arena with 57% of retailers planning to utilize AI as a means of enhancing customer service in the next two years.

## CUSTOMER SERVICE TECHNOLOGIES



■ IMPLEMENTED AND WORKING WELL  
■ IMPLEMENTED BUT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT  
■ IMPLEMENT WITHIN 2 YEARS

# About Windstream Enterprise Retail

Windstream Enterprise Retail is an innovative team of retail management consultants that combine deep retail business knowledge and cross-functional capabilities to deliver superior design and implementation of strategy, technology and process solutions. Their unique combination of industry focus, knowledge-based approach and agile, end-to-end solution deployment helps clients achieve their business potential.

## Retail consulting services include

- + Growth Strategy
- + Point of Sale (POS)
- + CRM/Loyalty
- + Order Management
- + Data Networks
- + AI-led Business Intelligence
- + Mobile POS
- + Unified Commerce
- + eCommerce
- + Private Equity Advisory
- + Business Process Optimization and RPA
- + Payment Security
- + Customer Experience & Engagement
- + Call Center Optimization

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The Future of Unified Commerce is based on findings from the 2019 Unified Commerce Survey and 2019 Special Report: The Future of Retail. BRP Consulting is now Windstream Enterprise Retail.

## About Windstream Enterprise

Windstream Enterprise collaborates with businesses across the U.S. to drive digital transformation by delivering solutions that solve today's most complex networking and communication challenges.

To learn more about Retail IT solutions, visit [windstreamenterprise.com](http://windstreamenterprise.com)

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