

The Cisco Intelligent Retail Network: Maximizing Competitiveness in Store Environments

In today's competitive environment, retailers must increasingly rely on in-store technologies to help enhance customer service, differentiate their stores in the marketplace, streamline operations, and increase revenues. Technologies such as kiosks and interactive handheld devices provide more information to sales associates and customers, enabling better decision making and increasing satisfaction. Rich media displays that provide educational or branding reinforcement are becoming commonplace. Retailers are also working to differentiate themselves by offering customers self-service tools and personal shopping assistants. Once a fairly traditional industry, retail is rapidly approaching the forefront of interactive technologies.

Stores are also increasing the use of technology to drive sales through delivery of nontraditional products and services. For example, in-store media has become a powerful way of reinforcing product promotions, as well as directly increasing store revenues by carrying partner and supplier advertising. Retailers are generating revenues from offering new services such as Wi-Fi "hotspots" and digital media products (photos, music, software) delivered to kiosks—which can provide a nearly limitless inventory and product selection.

To help employees be more productive, retailers are implementing additional tools that eliminate non-selling administrative tasks. PCs and wireless devices enable more consistent task management and activity control, as well as more sophisticated solutions, such as IP-based communications devices for intelligent call routing and intelligent communication within and across stores. Finally, solutions for inventory management, including wireless tools for supply chain management and RFID, are in the early stages of making significant changes to retail operations.

Empowered by these technologies, stores are pursuing new initiatives in support of their strategic objectives. However, as such systems are implemented at store sites, retail systems are inevitably becoming more complex. Security has become a critical concern for retailers hoping to empower their stores with voice, data, video, and multiple media types. As well, applications and the network must remain completely available, providing reliable, consistent messaging and service across the enterprise. To accomplish such mission-critical goals, retailers need to think more strategically about how to combine networks and store technologies in order to achieve maximum profitability.

The Cisco® Intelligent Retail Network

Cisco Systems® understands the needs of today's rapidly changing retail environment. New business requirements are increasing the complexity of technology and data usage while requiring retailers to share information with more suppliers, devices, and applications—exposing retailers to additional risk. As a result, stores are justifiably concerned about securely and reliably protecting brand image and assets.

The Cisco Intelligent Retail Network provides the foundation for delivering a set of common services to a broad range of devices and applications. This platform enables retailers to provide a single, centrally managed network for consistent and efficient data integration across functions and channels, as well as better security, manageability, and availability.

The Cisco Intelligent Retail Network

Addressing the Challenges of the Retail Industry

Retailers face crucial challenges as they work to create store environments that meet the demands of an increasingly competitive environment. Today's store usually consists of multiple proprietary networks managed in isolation. Over time, separate networks have been implemented to support point-of-sale (POS) systems, telephony, wireless, video/media, security and building automation, customer kiosks, and third-party ATMs and other devices.

This infrastructure is difficult to manage and secure. Information "islands" within functions and applications make it challenging to share information and network services. And retailers are limited in their ability to execute and bring new products and services to market, because of the difficulty and high cost of integrating yet another solution.

Ensuring Collaboration Between Employees

Most retailers still cannot provide their employees with the ability to effectively communicate with each other. Multiple devices and networks (two-way radios, pagers, cell phones) are often implemented at the store level, but not integrated with call center and corporate systems. This results in a complicated network of multiple devices—and the inability to connect with the proper resources at headquarters or other stores. Cisco provides integrated options to support complete voice communication, conferencing capabilities, data sharing, and call centers.

Providing Compatibility Between Retail Devices

To meet customer service, productivity, and sales growth goals, retailers are implementing greater numbers of different devices. These technologies are often implemented as point solutions, with little thought as to how they will interact with each other. As a result, retailers are often dismayed to find that new systems cannot support needed capabilities. Cisco's open network supports connectivity between store devices, applications, and systems, maximizing productivity and allowing them to communicate freely.

Accessing Information Anytime, Anywhere

Surprisingly, the most critical employees at any store—the associates who interact with customers—generally have access to the least amount of product information. Because store solutions are often not integrated, employees cannot securely share information across applications or devices. The result is that POS, customer, and inventory data are all separate from each other, requiring employees and management to access multiple systems to get a true picture of customer and product activity. The Cisco Intelligent Retail Network allows information to be securely shared throughout the store, providing better access to each associate.

Securing Retail Information

Increasing security concerns have prevented many retailers from implementing solutions needed to meet business objectives. In addition to concerns about the possibility of stolen customer data, retailers face new Payment Card Industry (PCI) compliance requirements from major credit card companies. The extreme complexity of multiple retail systems has made managing security a major challenge. The Cisco Intelligent Retail Network provides consistent security services and central management to protect brand image, assets, applications, and devices—from individual stores to headquarters.

Managing the Cost of Network Deployments

Retailers that have implemented applications as point solutions often have to support multiple networks for voice, video, and data. This adds a considerable financial burden to manage and secure these networks, as well as the overall cost of integrating future solutions. By building all of these services on one powerful Cisco foundation, retailers take advantage of a significant IT savings and a lower total cost of ownership.

Choosing the Solution Designed for Retail

Cisco Intelligent Retail Network solutions are specifically designed to meet the needs of this demanding industry. By uniting once-disparate systems in a single collaborative, open environment, stores are positioned to take advantage of today's technologies while anticipating tomorrow's advances. Based on this foundation, Cisco enables retailers to rely on a network designed to meet both current and future technology requirements.

Complete Store Connectivity

The Cisco Connectivity Solution enables high-bandwidth, persistent communications to enhance business processes through the access of information. It is designed to increase operating efficiency across the organization using wide area networks (WANs) and virtual private networks (VPNs) to access store and corporate information. This enhances standard retail applications with capabilities such as faster IP-based credit card authorization instead of traditional dial-up authorization; more frequent POS data transmission to corporate headquarters for increased inventory accuracy; and more efficient e-mail communication to keep store management up-to-date with corporate initiatives. It also supports new applications such as RFID for enhanced inventory management.

Mission-Critical Mobility

The Cisco Mission-Critical Mobility Solution extends secure connectivity—the same security available to wired networks—to wireless devices to improve productivity and reduce costs. Retailers can deliver information to the point of need, whether to an associate in the warehouse or a customer on the sales floor. A robust wireless environment provides a retailer with much more flexibility on where and how to deliver mission-critical data. Because this capability is completely integrated with Cisco wired solutions, retailers can deliver consistent, efficiently managed services to their wireless devices, including security, quality of service (QoS), and network management.

Collaborative Communications Across the Store

The Cisco Collaborative Communications Solution integrates intelligent voice and collaboration services on the network, converging data and voice systems to create powerful telephony, call center, and conferencing capabilities. This solution helps to reduce retail costs, improve productivity, and provide integrated communications throughout stores, call centers, and headquarters. Cisco has also partnered with leading retail application providers to provide additional IP phone capabilities, including employee productivity and customer interaction features such as time and attendance, employee bulletins, and product lookup.

Delivering In-Store Media to Customers

The Cisco In-Store Media Solution provides the infrastructure for delivering rich media directly into the store to educate customers and reinforce brands. This solution supports media-rich in-store applications that enhance customer satisfaction, such as interactive kiosks providing product and educational content. In-store broadcasting to plasma screens also enables retailers to generate revenue through selling multimedia advertising to partners and suppliers. Finally, rich-media solutions can help increase productivity through the delivery of employee training and operations applications.

The Cisco Intelligent Retail Network

Partnering with the Networking Leader

By selecting Cisco, retailers reap all the advantages of working with the leader of the networking industry. Cisco's ever-growing base of stores, application partnerships, comprehensive offerings, and world-class service and support are transforming today's stores into empowered selling environments.

Empowered by the Cisco Intelligent Retail Network, retailers gain the flexibility to meet constantly changing business and technology demands. Across the store—operations, merchandising, human resources, training, customer services, and the supply chain—organizations can develop a roadmap based on this powerful foundation. A foundation that will support their corporate vision for years into the future.

For More Information

To learn more about Cisco retail solutions, call your Cisco representative or reseller today, or visit: www.cisco.com/go/retailsolutions.



Corporate Headquarters

Cisco Systems, Inc.
170 West Tasman Drive
San Jose, CA 95134-1706
USA
www.cisco.com
Tel: 408 526-4000
800 553-NETS (6387)
Fax: 408 526-4100

European Headquarters

Cisco Systems International BV
Haarlerbergpark
Haarlerbergweg 13-19
1101 CH Amsterdam
The Netherlands
www-europe.cisco.com
Tel: 31 0 20 357 1000
Fax: 31 0 20 357 1100

Americas Headquarters

Cisco Systems, Inc.
170 West Tasman Drive
San Jose, CA 95134-1706
USA
www.cisco.com
Tel: 408 526-7660
Fax: 408 527-0883

Asia Pacific Headquarters

Cisco Systems, Inc.
168 Robinson Road
#28-01 Capital Tower
Singapore 068912
www.cisco.com
Tel: +65 6317 7777
Fax: +65 6317 7799

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