Improving customer satisfaction and operational efficiencies with a proven portal solution.
Executive summary

Customer loyalty, pressure to stand out from the competition and an inability to see or access critical information are some of the key challenges that face the retail industry today. Either by reducing costs, offering better customer service or providing unique specialty products, retailers must differentiate themselves. Information and technology are quickly becoming useful tools for gaining customer loyalty and increasing employee productivity. By improving visibility into online shopping metrics, inventory levels and corporate communications, retailers can make better decisions to gain more market share.

This executive brief shares how IBM’s portal solution, IBM WebSphere® Portal software, when built on a service-oriented architecture (SOA), provides the integrated user environment that retailers need to address the unique challenges facing their industry. With an integrated environment customized by user role, retailers can help to improve employee productivity—thereby enhancing customer satisfaction, increasing business responsiveness and driving new revenue opportunities.

Retail trends

Retailers face the ongoing challenge of driving more sales through differentiating their business from their competitors’. As part of this effort, store and online performance may be optimized, from stockroom to the point of sale, using store technology. Improved technology enhances the customer experience and improves the effectiveness of in-store employees. Not only is the store the outward face to customers, it’s also an important source of enterprise information used to establish buying patterns for a specific region. It is important to know when inventory levels are low. Gaining real-time visibility into stock levels helps minimize out-of-stock situations and keep customer satisfaction levels high.
With the proliferation of online shopping experiences, the value of a positive customer experience online is increasingly important. Industry sources say that as high as 77 percent\(^2\) of all potential online transactions are abandoned before the final sale. The right technology, presented in the right context, can give online shoppers the right information to make a final purchase decision. Today, retailers with an online presence want to support customers with an effortless Web shopping experience.

Related to the investment in retail technology is the need to create an integrated information flow from the cash wrap through to the corporate merchandising, purchasing and inventory systems. Retailers interested in creating this seamless flow of information from simple transactional systems to analytical systems are making investments in the infrastructure necessary to make this happen. Often this means integrating new functionality into existing systems, rather than replacing current application suites.

Over the next five years some basic factors will drive the retail industry to a highly consolidated market with complex customer demands. Shoppers, armed with ubiquitous access to information, will demand better value from every shopping experience. Customers will seek out and share information using the methods most comfortable to them, including the Internet and trusted proprietary sources. More and more consumers will either be looking for higher-end products or looking for the lowest price, depending on the customers’ own preferences and the particular item or service being purchased.

To meet the demands of low-cost shoppers, megaretailers will attempt to dominate the low-price markets through their breadth and scale, expanding rapidly across geographies, categories and segments. Specialist boutique retailers will also continue to thrive, serving customers who seek a unique and high-end shopping experience. Market leaders at both ends of this spectrum will differentiate themselves by exploiting new capabilities, such as real-time information, advanced analytics and automated systems, to reach operational optimization. They will become efficient, responsive enterprises built around agile, global data networks.

“*For the first time, retailers are linking technology with core business processes and making capital investment based on a fully aligned strategy.*”

—Jeff Roster, Gartner, 2004\(^1\)
“Without timely information from our stores, we couldn’t react to market trends as quickly as we should, and risked missing out on sales opportunities and hurting our profitability as a result.”

—Harry Bekkema, Mark’s Work Wearhouse

Improving customer satisfaction and operational efficiencies with a proven portal solution.

Portals help address the challenges of the retail industry

To meet productivity and differentiation needs, many retail organizations are turning to the flexibility and capabilities of portals. A portal is a single, personalized interface that integrates people, processes, applications and information. Personalized portals can help customers, employees, vendors and partners gain easy access to information. Portals can also help employees gain access to data crucial to performing their particular jobs, thereby improving overall productivity, increasing customer satisfaction, enhancing business responsiveness and maintaining a competitive edge.

To help address these challenges, IBM has developed IBM WebSphere Portal software, a member of the IBM® Workplace™ family. IBM WebSphere Portal software provides the framework that retailers are able to use to build and deploy portals personalized for a user’s role, preferences, profile and the security needs of the enterprise. With IBM WebSphere Portal software, organizations can integrate business applications, workflow, content and presence awareness in a single, role-based environment, enabling employees to gain easy access to information and resources, collaborate with other portal users inside and outside the store or company, and respond more quickly to customer needs.

Figure 1: An open standards-based Web or centralized model provides the ideal base to address a number of retail challenges.
Enhance customer satisfaction and retention

Customer satisfaction plays a large role in forecasting retail revenue. The retail industry often correlates revenue and cross-selling opportunities to a customer satisfaction index. As customer satisfaction measurements improve, increased revenue generation can be more easily projected. Therefore, gaining and keeping customers is a key goal across all types of retail, including online shopping.

With online shopping growing at an annual rate of 22 percent in 2005, as opposed to the traditional retail growth rate of 7 percent, gaining unique Web functionality with a portal can enhance customer brand loyalty. Portals can improve the online shopping experience by not only enabling customers to make purchases, but also by streamlining their ability to interact directly with sales associates. Online customers can shop, learn about store locations and hours, and find out about sales and specials, 24x7. These self-service capabilities help maximize customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers are more likely to finish the original transaction and buy additional products. Reduced customer turnover can translate directly into improved retail profitability.

Portals can also facilitate collaboration between Internet customers and store associates. With portal technology, a Web site can give customers enough data to make a purchase decision. For example, a portal shopper may need an item quickly; through portal technology, the customer might be able to access real-time inventory information to see that the item is ready for same-day shipment.

Or, if the customer has additional questions that the portal site cannot answer, the portal’s instant messaging capability could be utilized to facilitate an online, real-time conversation with a sales associate. If the shopper has found the desired item but is having difficulty with the checkout process, a single
click on a “Chat with sales associate” button can open an online messaging session. Perhaps the customer entered in an incorrect credit card number or isn’t certain what the credit card safety code is. An immediate answer can be a click away via instant messaging, enabling the purchase to be completed in the same online session. A satisfactory shopping experience can lead to greater brand loyalty, which can ultimately increase shopper satisfaction, enabling executives to better predict revenues.

Drive to operational efficiencies

Portals can improve operational efficiencies by providing simplified access to the critical applications and information employees need to effectively perform their daily tasks. A portal can aggregate all components that an employee needs into one role-based portal page, which can help lead to lower costs and increased profits. For example, a merchandiser’s portal page might include product order history, current inventory levels, projected lead times and any current marketing activities. With all this information in one place, the merchandiser can quickly assess whether the retailer has enough of a particular product in stock. If inventory needs to move to another store location to meet upcoming demands due to an in-store promotion, the merchandiser can order product to be relocated, thus avoiding a stock-out. The retailer will not lose sales due to a lack of product, improving overall operational efficiencies.
Information flowing from the corporate office to individual stores can also be integrated into a user’s portal page to support an individual store’s operations. The in-store manager is often responsible for coordinating merchandise displays and promotions that are received from the corporate office. Having all information in one view helps the manager see the seasonal fluctuations for a particular location, as well as what is selling well currently in a specific outlet. Combining that information with marketing promotions enables the manager to make smarter decisions regarding how much floor space to dedicate to sale items, for maximized sales.

Creating the ideal infrastructure for portals

To employ a portal solution effectively, retailers must have the proper infrastructure. A service-oriented architecture (SOA) is the ideal foundation for a retail portal. An SOA is a technical architecture that takes everyday business applications, such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems or inventory tracking, and breaks them down into individual business functions and processes, called services.
Once a retail organization defines its competencies, each one can be executed as a service and then combined and recombined to support the different activities and changing needs of the retailer. A service could be a business function such as check inventory level or a system capability such as log in user. The role of the portal is to act as the delivery mechanism for services, aggregating them and exposing them to each unique audience in a secure and personalized way.

Figure 3: Retail portals assemble sufficient information to act on business requirements.

A retail portal can be personalized depending on the user’s role. For instance, a merchandise manager’s portal page can provide a consolidated view of product order history, current inventory levels, projected lead times and any current targeted marketing activity—all in a single view. With all the information in one place, the manager can make more-informed decisions and forecast what current product sales might be.
Improving customer satisfaction and operational efficiencies with a proven portal solution.

To further improve productivity and streamline business processes, multiple portal applications, or portlets, can be choreographed to facilitate the execution of an end-to-end process (which can be especially useful when multiple people are involved in a single business process). In the case of merchandising, for example, different portlets and personalized portal pages can be created for the individual users involved: the store associate, buyer, store manager and merchandise manager. Each audience can then use the portal for a variety of purposes, yet the portal would capture and deliver the information relevant for each user, while providing a unified view.
Improving customer satisfaction and operational efficiencies with a proven portal solution.

The componentization of business processes also allows retailers to extend those processes (in the form of services) to customers, partners and suppliers as warranted, or recombine them as new market opportunities arise.

The business value of portals
Portals can deliver significant business benefits that go beyond improved productivity. The productive and collaborative environment enabled by portals can help a retailer become an On Demand Business. As defined by IBM, an On Demand Business is an enterprise whose business processes—integrated end to end across the company and with key partners, suppliers and customers—can respond with flexibility and speed to any customer demand, market opportunity or external threat. IBM WebSphere Portal software provides dynamic access to information and applications, thereby enhancing collaboration between users and enabling retailers to respond in real time to changing market conditions.
An integrated portal solution can help retailers realize the following business benefits:

- **Cost savings**: build and deploy applications and services faster; consolidate the procurement of hardware and software; reduce back-office staff and administration costs
- **Operational efficiency**: enable internal employees and external partners to communicate through one channel; link event-based, cross-functional business processes; increase data accuracy and speed decision making
- **Revenue generation**: provide more cross-selling opportunities to employees; leverage the expertise of knowledge experts through enhanced collaboration and learning; expand market share and move into new markets
- **User satisfaction**: increase customer retention through enhanced service capabilities; improve productivity with easier access to information; gain a competitive distinction by enabling superior customer service

**A trusted provider of technology in retail solutions**

In today’s highly dynamic market, retailers need to improve their productivity as a means to enhance customer satisfaction, increase business responsiveness and optimally leverage their human and IT assets to differentiate themselves and maintain a competitive edge. With IBM WebSphere Portal software, retailers can integrate their electronic user environment into a single, cohesive interface and provide employees with easier access to the information and resources they need to be more productive. Retailers can feel confident that IBM can help them achieve their business initiatives with integrated and proven portal solutions.

**For more information**

To find out more about IBM WebSphere Portal software, please visit:

[ibm.com/websphere/portal](http://ibm.com/websphere/portal)
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10-05
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2 www.finfacts.com/intpurchases.htm
3 IBM WebSphere Portal software is a single component of the IBM Workplace family of offerings.
4 “The State of Retailing Online 8.0,” an annual report published by Shop.org in conjunction with Forrester Research.
Mark’s Work Wearhouse drives profits with realtime point-of-sale information.

Overview

■ Challenge
Costly, inefficient sales information-sharing systems made it difficult for clothing retailer to consistently stock its stores with the right mix of products, causing it to miss sales opportunities

■ Why Become an On Demand Business?
Mark’s Work Wearhouse needed a flexible, resilient infrastructure to respond more quickly to market trends and customer needs, so that it could drive sales and increase profitability

■ Solution
The retailer implemented an integrated, Web-based sales reporting system that enables company executives to make better marketing decisions by quickly sensing changes in customer preferences and responding in realtime

■ Key Benefits
Enhanced responsiveness to customers, fostering greater loyalty and helping to increase sales; 30% lower TCO; 50% reduction in training costs; near 100% system availability

It never fails: Your morning coffee splashes on your shirt on the day you’ve decided to wear a white one. However, if your clothes are made with stain-repellent cotton fabrics developed by Mark’s Work Wearhouse (Mark’s), you can literally brush away the problem without damage.

The Canadian retail giant behind “clothes that work,” Mark’s (www.marks.com) has earned the loyalty of consumers by developing and designing practical, easy-care apparel. Headquartered in Calgary,

“Without timely information from our stores, we couldn’t react to market trends as quickly as we should, and risked missing out on sales opportunities and hurting our profitability as a result.”

—Harry Bakkema, Application Team Lead, Mark’s Work Wearhouse
Alberta, the 27-year-old company is today a wholly-owned subsidiary of Canadian Tire Corporation. Nearly 4,000 employees staff more than 300 stores, each stocked with innovative items such as washable suede jackets and footwear cushioned with air bags. Mark’s expects more than CA$560 million (US$417 million) in sales this year.

Until recently, the retailer tracked sales across its growing enterprise through a network of point-of-sale (POS) systems. However, the systems required their own in-store processors, making them increasingly costly and time-consuming for the company’s small IT staff to maintain. Hardware was also being discontinued, and it was difficult to obtain parts. What’s more, getting sales information transferred from each location to headquarters required a nightly batch process. This resulted in a time lag that made it difficult for the company’s decision makers to move the right pieces of apparel to the right stores at the right time. “It was particularly challenging to keep the proper items on our racks during sales promotions, because we didn’t know how each store was faring until the next day,” says Harry Bekkema, application team lead, Mark’s. “When you run out of advertised sales items, customers won’t be happy and may not return to your store.”

What’s more, store sales information was routed to Mark’s headquarters in batches, preventing executives from having a timely, comprehensive view of the entire business. Says Bekkema, “Without timely information from our stores, we couldn’t react to market trends as quickly as we should, and risked missing out on sales opportunities and hurting our profitability as a result.”

Operating in a fiercely competitive environment, Mark’s needed to find a retail reporting system that would enable it to give employees instant access to enterprise-wide sales information, so it could be more responsive to market demands and customer needs. By doing so, the retailer could drive sales, reduce costs and enhance profitability.

**Integrating enterprise-wide POS information in realtime**

Working with IBM Business Partners Business Objects, Dog Star Systems and Sandbox Systems, Mark’s replaced its legacy POS sales reporting system with an integrated, open, Web-based sales reporting application. The easy-to-use solution provides a consolidated, realtime view of enterprise-wide sales results, allowing decision makers to quickly sense changes in customer preferences and then respond with appropriate merchandise.

Employees can now track sales targets on a moment’s notice, balancing products according to customer demand. For example, a Vancouver store that has sold most of its sale-priced rain jackets can pull stock from its Victoria counterpart, knowing that this location is moving the item more slowly. Similarly, when bad weather impacts product delivery schedules, the company is better pre-

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**On Demand Business Benefits**

- Enhanced responsiveness to customer needs and market demands from realtime sales reporting and “sense and respond” decision making, contributing to greater loyalty
- 30% lower TCO, contributing to higher profitability
- 50% reduction in training time and costs due to reporting system’s ease of use
- Near 100% availability due to resilient IT infrastructure
- Ability to focus on core competencies with support from IBM Business Partners

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“Our Web-based sales reporting application has transformed Mark’s Work Wearhouse into an up-to-the-minute learning organization. By monitoring our business in realtime, we can make better decisions to help drive our business forward.”

— Robin Lynas, CIO, Mark’s Work Wearhouse
pared to make adjustments based on realtime knowledge of product demand at affected stores. Marketing executives who meet Monday mornings can now get up-to-date sales figures from each store, enabling them to launch or adjust targeted promotions that can directly affect that week’s sales.

“Our Web-based sales reporting application has transformed Mark’s Work Wearhouse into an up-to-the-minute learning organization,” says Robin Lynas, the company’s CIO. “By monitoring our business in realtime, we can make better decisions to help drive our business forward. We can then respond with better, more timely decisions to help drive our business forward.”

**Resilient Linux and IBM solution**

Mark’s has gained significant performance and cost-saving advantages by developing its Web-based sales reporting application with IBM DB2® for iSeries™, IBM @server® systems and Crystal Enterprise from Business Objects. The retailer leveraged the expertise of Calgary-based Dog Star Systems, a specialist in IBM @server iSeries and IBM @server xSeries®, to deploy the Java™ technology-based solution, which was customized by its internal application development team. The solution is powered by IBM SurePOS™ 53X Internet Protocol-based cash registers running Retek Point-of-Sale (RPOS) software, a robust combination that provides cash, inventory, customer and labor management functionality. The application server software resides on resilient xSeries systems running Red Hat Linux at Mark’s corporate headquarters.

To leverage its extensive skills in IBM DB2 for iSeries, the company ported RPOS from its native Oracle database to DB2. RPOS data is propagated to a back-end data warehouse, which was developed with DB2 for iSeries, Version 5, and Retail IDEAS business analysis software from Scottsdale, Arizona-based IBM Business Partner JDA Software. Notes Bekkema. “DB2 is incredibly reliable—we haven’t needed a full-time database administrator—and it represents a substantial cost saving compared to the Oracle database.”

To further generate meaningful insights from the RPOS data, the retailer worked with Business Objects to deploy Crystal Enterprise reporting, analysis and information delivery software, including Crystal Reports for data access on an xSeries. The enterprise reporting solution from Business Objects gives Mark’s a fast and efficient way to deliver out-of-the-box, ad-hoc reporting capabilities to all its employees, so they can evaluate information such as store performance by district, end-of-day sales results and sales by product category.

Employees access the Business Objects solution through Mark’s corporate intranet, which the retailer built with help from Sandbox Systems, a Calgary developer of customized, mission-critical e-business and e-learning applications.

**Key Components**

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<td>IBM WebSphere Portal - Express</td>
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<td>IBM DB2 for iSeries, Version 5</td>
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<td>IBM SurePOS 53X</td>
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<td>Sandbox Systems</td>
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“The combination of WebSphere and DB2 software, Linux and IBM @server systems gives us an affordable, resilient, function-rich IT infrastructure for our mission-critical POS application.”

—Harry Bekkema
The portal runs on a single xSeries server, powered by IBM WebSphere Portal - Express. Store employees use an open-source Web browser to access the company’s back-end Java applications. Since the stores connect to the iSeries systems at company headquarters rather than maintaining their own hardware installations, the retailer has cut its total cost of IT ownership by an impressive 30 percent.

“The combination of WebSphere and DB2 software, Linux and IBM @server systems gives us an affordable, resilient, function-rich IT infrastructure for our mission-critical POS application,” says Bekkema. “Integrating Crystal Enterprise into the environment gives us the advantage of faster, more comprehensive and meaningful reporting than was possible with our previous POS system.”

Focusing on retail business
In transforming its retail operations, Mark’s drew heavily on its longstanding relationship with IBM. “The strength of our connection led us directly to IBM for a solution to our problem,” says Bekkema. “In addition to meeting our technology needs, IBM and its Business Partners provide the responsive support that frees us to focus on our retail business.” Dog Star professionals staff the sales reporting application help desk, allowing Mark’s to assign its own IT professionals to application development and enhancement projects.

The retailer was also attracted by IBM’s support for Linux and open standards-based solutions. Because they are based on open standards, Linux, DB2 and WebSphere software were easy to integrate with third-party applications to form a complete solution. “Our confidence in running Linux for a mission-critical application was reinforced during a recent holiday season, when we logged CA$35 to CA$45 million (US$26 to US$34 million) in sales during a 70-store pilot without even a hiccup in our system,” says Lynas.

The remaining stores were rolled out in spring 2003, and 300 stores were running the software by early summer.

Capturing closet space
The retailer’s new sales reporting solution is available nearly 100 percent of the time, enabling business decision makers to quickly sense changes in market trends and respond in realtime. Because the solution is easy to administer, Mark’s has been able to maintain its existing IT staffing level. And since it is easy to use, the company is enjoying a 50 percent reduction in both training costs and time.

All told, Mark’s has more closely aligned its business operations with market trends. “We’ve always had a very loyal customer base because we provide good value for quality clothing,” says Bekkema. “By enhancing our responsiveness to customer needs through our IBM and Linux sales reporting application, we know our customers will continue to be happy and we will be better positioned to increase sales and profitability.”

For more information
Please contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner.

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03-04
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G225-4303-00
Employee productivity still pays the bills

By Ralph Jacobson, Global Retail Solutions Executive

Perspective context
A new technology seems to come to market each week. Retailers feel compelled to invest in technology to gain competitive advantage. However, no investment guarantees success without the buy-in of the people who must make it work at the store. Perennial challenges plague retailers’ second-largest controllable expense (labor) and make it tough to deliver service:

- High turnover rates specific to sales employees;
- Constant need for training;
- Employee dissatisfaction due to lack of knowledge;
- Customer dissatisfaction due to lack of associate knowledge; and
- Annual pressure to reduce labor expense.

Fifty percent of a typical store manager’s time is spent on administrative tasks instead of being spent on customers or coaching employees. Although this fact is nothing new, retailers must take a new approach to change this historical result of ineffective people management.

Retailers who have chosen the “People as an Asset” path are reaping benefits which are tangible and have demonstrated true ROI. Some of the key workforce management enablers are:

- Focused, consistent delivery of information and content;
- Role based access to actionable information;
- Management by exception;
- Reduction of non-value added administrative tasks;
- Focused insight into poor performing areas;
- Corporate gatekeeper(s) to limit and smooth workloads; and
- On demand training for new and existing employees.

While every retailer hopes to gain a competitive edge…

IBM believes Retailers should approach their workforce as an asset as opposed to an expense

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<tr>
<th>Historic view</th>
<th>Progressive view</th>
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<td>Maximize value</td>
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<td>Differentiate on low price:</td>
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<td>- Hire cheapest labor</td>
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<td>- Tolerate high turnover</td>
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<td>- Low investment in developing people</td>
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<td>Manage workforce as an EXPENSE</td>
<td>Manage workforce as an ASSET</td>
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<td>Deliver expected levels of service and sales</td>
<td>Drive customer loyalty:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand service, task and performance expectations</td>
<td>- Hire the best workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve skills and achieve goals</td>
<td>- Strive for high retention</td>
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<td>Communicate work availability to store management in a timely manner</td>
<td>- Invest in building employees</td>
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IBM Global Business Services
These efforts drive benefits similar to the following:

**Hard benefits**
- Increase district/region management span of control;
- Lower publication and communication costs;
- Reduce out-of-stocks; and
- Reduce associate hours.

**Soft benefits**
- Improve program execution;
- Reduce administrative task interference;
- Increase manager floor time;
- Lower employee turnover; and
- Accelerate speed to market.

**Where to begin the workforce management transformation**

1. **Role-based Employee Information portal** – device-agnostic portal, integrating and e-enabling core employee work processes, i.e., store manager, merchandise manager, associate.

2. **Mobile Wireless & Network Services** – services revolving around both the customer and the employee to provide information on the move throughout the store and on demand throughout the network.

3. **People Management** – moving simple and administrative activities to self-service access, dynamic staff scheduling, and streamlined HR processes.

4. **Learning and Development** – learning infused throughout the working experience, delivered at point of need, managed, and measured.

5. **Task Management and Communication** – activities and tasks managed and organized to drive productivity thus delivering information at the point of need.

6. **Business Process Driven Integration** – daily business processes integrated in a seamless fashion and exposed to the user.

7. **Role based Key performance indicators, Alerts, and Analytics.**

These and other tactics will drive performance and loyalty in your workforce.

To learn more about IBM Global Business Services, contact your IBM sales representative, or visit:

[ibm.com/retail](http://ibm.com/retail)

**Ralph Jacobson**

Ralph Jacobson is the Global TotalStore Solution Executive for IBM. He is responsible for developing offerings for IBM Clients in areas including business strategy, store operations and the customer experience of the future. Ralph has worked in The Retail Industry for thirty years having begun with the largest supermarket company in Chicago, then having consulted to more than one-hundred Retailers around the globe, from Shanghai to Saudi Arabia.
Retail store operations are burdened by thin margins precipitated by fierce discounting. Empowered consumers seek the lowest prices while demanding premier service. And retail operations struggle with lack of access to timely business information. Retail market shifts and competitive pressures contribute to elevated store operational expenses, decreasing revenues and waning customer loyalty.

High employee turnover, fueled by lack of staff development, also undermines retail growth. Helping untrained staff perform their jobs distracts you from core responsibilities—which can diminish productivity and the quality of customer service. And recruiting new, qualified staff is costly and time consuming. Often, store managers postpone their key duties to deliver training.

Streamline operations with integrated On Demand Business solutions that help drive productivity and revenue.

**Highlights**

- Helps simplify store operations by integrating relevant retail business applications and information in a single, easy-to-use work environment
- Enables users to access business data and reports instantly, helping to increase operational efficiency and improve customer service
- Lets you deliver cost-effective, in-store training to floor staff to help maximize time, develop skills and increase retention
- Helps increase employee responsiveness through instant communication by leveraging integrated collaborative tools

Retail store operations are burdened by thin margins precipitated by fierce discounting. Empowered consumers seek the lowest prices while demanding premier service. And retail operations struggle with lack of access to timely business information. Retail market shifts and competitive pressures contribute to elevated store operational expenses, decreasing revenues and waning customer loyalty.

High employee turnover, fueled by lack of staff development, also undermines retail growth. Helping untrained staff perform their jobs distracts you from core responsibilities—which can diminish productivity and the quality of customer service. And recruiting new, qualified staff is costly and time consuming. Often, store managers postpone their key duties to deliver training.

Or associates travel offsite to complete expensive, lengthy training courses. Bringing corporate knowledge, sales skill and teamwork to the sales floor can more effectively prepare associates for their jobs.

The IBM® Workplace™ for Retail Store Operations solution helps you train store employees to be more productive and helps you increase staff retention. Offer convenient, targeted training and promotional programs to attract career-oriented candidates. Generate reports based on key performance indicators (KPIs)—so you can track and enhance processes based on market shifts. And communicate in real time with colleagues to speed communication and responsiveness to customers.
**Improve key retail practices with initiatives for On Demand Business**

To thrive in today’s retail market, you need to adopt an On Demand Business approach to managing in-store operations. This includes being responsive to changing customer and employee needs.

Achieving higher levels of productivity. Focusing on tasks that add value to the store and its customers. And being prepared to handle any threats and opportunities that unfold.

To be a retail On Demand Business, your team needs the industry-specific tools in the IBM Workplace for Retail Store Operations solution. This customizable solution set lets you add and modify software and services to quickly and efficiently plan and execute promotions and programs. You can also share best practices used by your most successful stores. Collaborative tools let employees find and share business-critical information instantly. Reports and alerts give your managers real-time tools to monitor staff performance and sales goals, and to plan, schedule and manage in-store tasks more effectively by adjusting processes to address problems. You can also use this information to capitalize on trends by leveraging your Web site to execute timely, revenue-generating marketing initiatives designed to drive customers to your retail locations. And e-learning software helps you cost effectively develop employee skills and retain a proficient workforce. All of which can help you increase operational efficiency, enhance employee and customer satisfaction and subsequently gain competitive advantage.

**Boost productivity with integrated real-time access to information and people**

Increasing the operational efficiency of your retail stores is critical to reducing costs. You need to be able to swiftly and effectively manage operations—including staff schedules, weekly sales promotions and inventory reviews—and make business decisions based on accurate, up-to-date information.

With the IBM Workplace for Retail Store Operations solution, you and your staff have on demand access to the information you need to be productive. Collaborative tools—instant messaging, Web conferencing, presence awareness, project team-rooms and an online company directory—are integrated in one simple interface to provide instant access to colleagues and vital data from one location. These tools let your staff leverage information across and outside the organization, so they can respond more quickly and effectively to business situations and share best practices among stores.

**Analyze and improve business processes using reports and alerts**

Recognizing and understanding market trends can help you and your team fine-tune store operations to...
achieve optimum efficiency. Employees have more information available to them than ever before. Enable your team to be more productive by delivering real-time access to information through robust tools. With IBM Workplace for Retail Store Operations reporting tools, you can measure and analyze business data. Then use it to revise in-store processes, capitalizing on the latest trends to optimize productivity. For example, you can generate a report that correlates business performance to employee capabilities. Then assess and update employee skills as needed. Or, using a report that compares sales from the same period between two years, you can immediately adjust marketing strategies and inventory to help increase sales.

You can also receive alerts to extend real-time management on the sales floor. For example, alerts can notify you when inventories need to be replenished. So customers can always find what they’re shopping for. Access to real-time business information enables you and your staff to assess and react to trends and everyday business fluctuations more quickly than with slower, traditional data-gathering means—helping streamline business processes and improve customer and employee satisfaction.

Retain adept employees with on-demand e-learning solutions
Attracting and retaining proficient employees and helping them improve their skills are keys to running a successful retail operation. Training equips employees with essential retail skills, promoting productivity. But it’s a time-intensive, expensive proposition.

With IBM Workplace for Retail Store Operations e-learning management tools, your staff can become familiar with your policies and procedures. They can understand customer requirements and how to meet them to close more sales. And your staff never have to leave your location to develop their skills. Through in-store training, your employees can apply what they’ve learned immediately on the sales floor. You can save money and gain a higher return on your investments in human resources.

Providing convenient, self-service e-learning opportunities also empowers your staff, helping them take charge of their own career development. Which can attract more dedicated candidates to your business.

Develop customer service capabilities to build a loyal customer base
Customers today are more sophisticated and knowledgeable than ever, fueling intense competition between retail stores. To rise above competitors, you need to attract more customers and provide the superior service they demand. An IBM Workplace for Retail Store Operations collaborative solution provides instant communication through integrated collaborative tools that enable your staff to more quickly resolve customer issues. For example, employees can quickly find answers to customer questions and determine which stores currently stock inventory requested by customers.

Leverage targeted solutions to succeed in the retail market
In the competitive retail industry, only the fittest organizations survive—and succeed. With IBM Workplace for Retail Store Operations collaborative tools, report and alert features, real-time data access and e-learning software—in one simple interface—you can drive productivity. Give your staff the information they need to do their jobs more effectively. And efficiently and economically train associates to provide better customer service. Achieving these objectives can reduce costs, increase revenue and position your retail business to succeed.

For more information
To learn more about IBM Workplace solutions, visit:

ibm.com/software/workplace/solutions

ibm.com/lotus

To learn more about IBM software and learning solutions, visit:

ibm.com/learning/