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THE BUYER'S GUIDE TO **RETAIL TASK MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE**

For today's retailers, a booming digital economy means that the days of traditional store opening hours are long gone; with the ability to browse stock on our smart devices, place orders around the clock, and engage with brands across a variety of social platforms, we're demanding more than ever before from our bricks and mortar shopping experiences.

The fast paced challenges that are presented by a 24/7 multi-channel trading environment mean that brands need robust operational strategies in order to keep up. As such, retailers are looking to emerging technology in the retail task management space in order to streamline working efficiencies, improve communications throughout the organization, and operate at optimal levels of productivity.

These developing technologies are redefining the nature of retail, and as retail task management software continues to evolve, retailers considering such an investment are likely to consist of the following two categories:

- Enterprises that have yet to invest in a software solution, relying instead on manual processes and basic systems such as Excel spreadsheets

- Businesses that have already established the use of retail task management software throughout their organization, but consider the product to be out of date, or not adequate for today's real-time pace

For retailers still struggling with disparate systems and a complete lack of task automation, chaos may reign throughout the business; issues of mis-communication, inconsistencies and poor task implementation can hold retailers back from reaching their true potential.

And for early adopters of first generation retail task management software, the picture might not be much clearer; your current solution may be proving to be inefficient or limited in its capabilities, and when compared with today's industry-leading tools, you may find it falling short.

Whichever scenario applies to you, this buyer's guide aims to help you understand how new developments in retail task management software can transform the operational landscape of your retail business. With our informative Q&A format, we'll talk you through the benefits you can expect to see, the tools and features you need, and how to select the product that's right for your organization.

Q. 1 Do I really need to automate my retail operational task management processes?

Automation is essential for effective organization within a large scale business. A good automated solution will overcome a poor flow of communication, organize and improve the way that tasks are allocated and allow you to better manage how activities are being carried out throughout your retail chain.

Without automating your retail task processes, you'll be relying on a complicated structure of disparate systems and inadequate manual administration, including outdated methods such as calls, portals, emails, paper manuals and mystery shoppers to communicate plans and required standards to stores.

These inefficiencies in task and communication management ultimately reduce your likelihood of delivering a fulfilling and cohesive customer experience where it matters most - the sales floor. You'll see the results of task management automation all the way from the CEO's desk to the till point.

Q.2 Will retail task management software improve communication throughout my retail chain?

The corporate strategy of your retail business relies on flawless execution at store level, a process which is dependent on strong lines of communication throughout your ecosystem. You need to get your messages to the right people at the right time; with retail task management software, you'll be able to communicate at the speed of today's business. You'll instantly connect multiple sites to each other, uniting stores, HR and HQ colleagues through one continual line of discussion and interaction. Communications can be targeted and filtered to ensure relevancy, delivering tasks and messages to where they most apply.

Every day, corporate needs to issue instructions for promotions, merchandising, pricing changes, loss prevention, training and other initiatives - as a result, store managers and associates are overloaded with communications from a multitude of sources, many of which may not be relevant to them. When communication breaks down, retail tasks are not implemented correctly, vital information, instructions or requests for help are missed, and the in-store experience, brand vision and the sales it drives, suffer.

Q.3 How can I better manage the execution of tasks across multiple locations?

The aim of your retail chain is to spread its reach far and wide, but this can bring challenges when it comes to keeping everyone on the same page. When you have multiple retail and office sites across different geographic locations, task management software will help you to deliver the same high levels of staff satisfaction, customer experience and brand integrity in each and every store.

You'll be able to tailor the interactions you have between sites, delivering different instructions to different places. Stores receive filtered, specific instructions that are targeted and relevant to them. Inconsistencies from store to store can also be eliminated - processes and instructions for tasks such as merchandising, promotions and aesthetics can be controlled per location, and with the function for stores to submit photographs of completed tasks, you can be sure that each outlet is carrying out a task correctly. In this way, quality execution and cohesive results can be monitored and maintained at every customer touch point.

With disparate manual systems unable to keep up with the differing needs of various locations, communications become diluted from place to place, problems in certain areas go under the radar, widespread adoption of new initiatives can be uneven, and the issuing of tasks and information can become scattered, inefficient or lack relevancy. Store managers may feel remote, left to interpret and action corporate messages in their own ways.

Q.4 Should help ticketing functionality be a priority for our business?

All retail business encounter problems, and when things go wrong, you need to know about it. With help ticketing software designed specifically with retailers in mind, you'll be able to provide a direct and constant line of assistance between HR departments or HQ and store associates, giving staff immediate and easy access to the help, resources and supplies they need.

Advanced help ticketing software will make receiving requests and allocating reponses easy – you'll be able to quickly filter issues that arise and delegate a help ticket to the most relevant person to get the problem solved, and link store staff to Knowledge Base content such as Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) documents and training guides so that they have access to the information they need. HQ can see a clear overview of where issues are consistently occurring, receive feedback from ground level, dispatch resources to where they're needed or give additional guidance.

Without a streamlined help ticketing system, stores are left to fend for themselves, problems go unresolved, and staff feel unsupported. Roles on the front line lack the ability to communicate their feedback, and face a complicated, time consuming and ineffectual system for reporting problems and requesting help.

Q.5 Would retail task management software help me to organize my retail calendar more effectively?

Every day is different within the retail industry, and you need highly responsive and flexible retail task management software to keep up with changes of pace and differing activities that need to be carried out. With such a solution in place, you'll be able to keep track of day to day tasks such as mark downs and signage by communicating SOPs via a calendar to keep everyone concentrated on current priorities. Enable focused execution with task filtering by role, geography and categorization, and solve seasonality issues by sorting tasks for those in season and out of season.

Q.6 Will task management software improve working practices for Operations and Head Office teams?

Your Operations and Head Office departments need to know what's happening at the front line of your retail chain, without having to be there. Retail task management software will give your corporate teams the field insight they need, as well as the support to improve their internal working efficiencies.

Your employees will benefit from tools such as being able to save and reuse templates for common task types, building recurring task types once and distributing as required, (versus multiple single tasks), and the targeting of tasks to the right individuals and roles, rather than bulk sending irrelevant comms to the entire organization. Automating these processes and using a simplistic user interface drives HQ productivity.

Q.7 Can retail task management software also benefit front line staff on the sales floor?

Improving task workflow increases productivity throughout the hierarchy of your organization; for those at sales level, targeted visibility allows fields users to focus on their store alone, rather than the entire business, and the direct line of communication to HQ or support departments makes it easy to send help tickets and requests for assistance when challenges arise.

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Q.8 How can I utilize task management software to improve the engagement levels of my employees?

Motivating staff throughout your retail business is key to ensuring that all tasks are carried out to the highest standards and in delivering the best levels of customer service. Task management software allows employees to feel more engaged within their roles by providing a clear structure for instruction, ensuring they know exactly what needs to be done, how, and when. This improved relay of information increases the ability to get a job done right first time, allowing more time for customer facing activities, and the ability to directly report back their progress, track their tasks and hit targets provides a tangible measure of their success.

For all staff, days can be made easier with the more efficient working processes afforded by task management software, and employees feel valued through the implementation of a responsive help ticketing system, inclusive communication network of fellow stores and offices, and access to an ongoing support structure.

Q.9 Retailers are busy – can I rely on these platforms to keep up with me when I'm on the go?

The right retail task management software will support you wherever you happen to be; having access to a mobile app version will allow you to see what's happening as you move throughout your retail chain, and will enable on-the-fly execution, with field users being able to manage their stores on the move. You'll also have a variety of information at your fingertips, with immediate, real-time data enabling leaders to manage what's important when between stores, and field leaders being able to identify hot spots and action troubleshooting.

Q.10 How easy it is to implement this kind of platform?

Software as a Service (SaaS) platforms require weeks to implement, not months, ensuring that you can be up and running with retail task management and help ticketing software in a short space of time. The organized and flexible design of the right solution will also allow customization, versus ridged off the shelf designs, ensuring that you can modify your system to have it performing to the exact needs of your retail business.

Q.11 Can smaller retailers also benefit from using task management software?

Yes, task management software benefits all sizes of retail operations. Improving processes for task delegation and implementing an effective tool for communication shows measurable and actionable results from small retailers to larger chains. Whether you need to bring your working efficiencies up to speed with a robust system that can match the pace of a busy retail climate, or you've outgrown an existing system which no longer meets your needs, modern task management platforms are scalable as your enterprise grows, with a range of options to suit all business sizes.
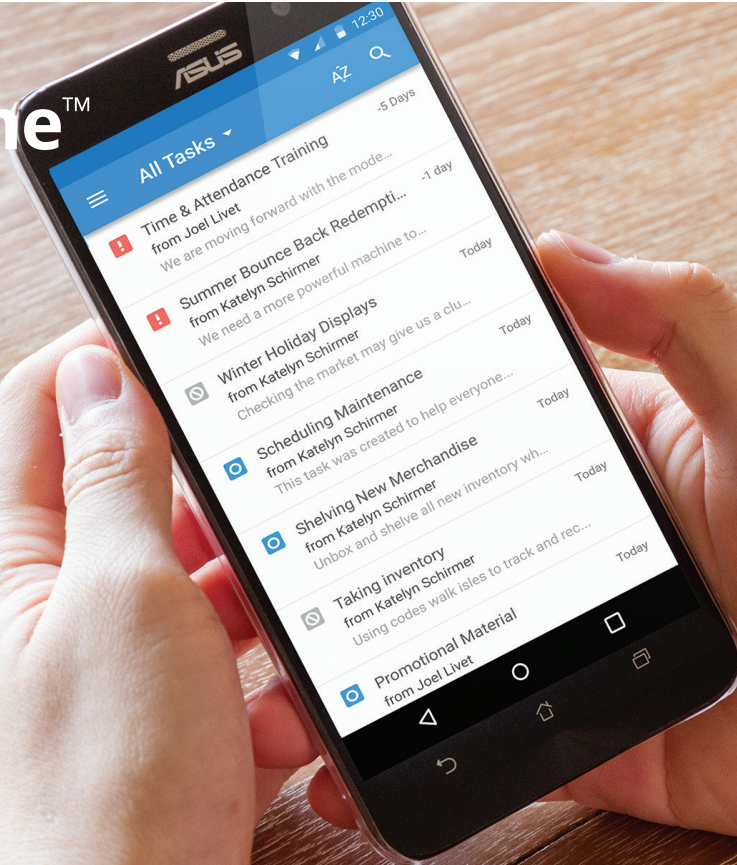
Q.12 How do I keep my finger on the pulse and gain business insights?

Without a clear understanding of what's truly happening at every level of your retail business, you'll struggle to manage your chain effectively. Retail task management software will give you both the general overview, and the specific details that you need, providing actionable intelligence throughout your retail operation. You'll have access to a comprehensive outline of what's happening where with reports, widget and dashboards, giving you the insight and information you need in order to make better business decisions. By keeping every aspect of your retail ecosystem connected and communicating, you'll also be able to receive feedback and data from ground level, enabling you to act more locally, target your troubleshooting and deliver improvements where they're needed.

Q.13 Is my current task management software out of date/doing enough?

You may not be new to task management software, but that doesn't mean that you currently have the best system for the job; if you do have a technological solution already in place, ask yourself if it is optimized for the tasks you truly need it to perform? With advancements in the software sector and disruptors such as ThinkTime leading the way with new innovations, it may be that your existing platform may prove limited in comparison. Ensuring that you have the best tools available to your retail team will ultimately provide the best return on your investment, and will help keep you at the front of the field in a competitive marketplace.

Summary

The implementation of retail task management, communication and help ticketing software improves productivity at all levels of your retail business. The combination of unified lines of communication, the streamlined allocation of tasks, automated monitoring of performance, and corrective actions for non-compliant stores can help retailers accurately execute corporate strategies at store level, and deliver the optimal customer experience.

The right retail task management software will bring your corporate strategists, regional and store managers and sales associates together seamlessly, allowing everyone to work from the same page in order to action one united vision for your company. In-store execution can be dramatically improved by ensuring front line staff are given the information they really need in order to do the job right, first time, raising customer service levels by allowing associates more time to focus on customer-facing activities.

In a fast paced industry, retailers can differentiate themselves by utilizing the most comprehensive and effective of these software solutions. A state of the art system is essential in transforming levels of productivity, and those still relying on manual and disjointed processes, and or making do with outdated software platforms that are no longer sufficient, risk being left behind.

With software innovation at this level, you can dream of a platform that allows you to conduct business in real-time, via mobile devices, so that work gets done on the fly and you minimize down time at all levels - what would that level of workflow intensity do for your P&L?

The Return on Investment business case is proven, and swift, with measurable delivery of productivity improvements across all levels. Risk is significantly reduced through better and more consistent task execution, allowing your overall brand plans to be realized in a more precise and constructive manner.

ThinkTime as the retail task management solution for your business

A newly emerging disruptor in the marketplace, ThinkTime is retail task management, communication and help ticketing software package brought to you by the people who know retail. Led by a team with over 30 years of retail experience, ThinkTime draws on its in-depth knowledge of the industry to produce never before seen solutions to the challenges that you really face. Allowing you to see measurable results in improving your approach to critical communication, executing tasks more effectively and consistently, and supporting your employees to access the help they need, you'll be able to gather intelligence about your retail business in real-time, and allow your associates more presence on the sales floor.

About **ThinkTime**

After more than 30 years working in and around retail, we know the vital role tasking plays in the retail workplace.

It's a fine line completing the day in day out stuff that needs to get done while simultaneously delivering excellent customer service. It is critical to communicate effectively, provide the tools necessary and measure and track the completion of tasks. It is even more important, however, is getting associates back focused on the customer, selling and delivering brand elevating customer service - fast!

That's the difference ThinkTime makes inside our clients workplaces everyday. When employees feel strong direction and support they are more engaged in delivering personalized service to their customers. And that means a strong return on investment for your tasking hours everyday.

What's different about our product is it's simplicity - ThinkTime is intuitive. Retail executives and analysts alike are calling ThinkTime a "disruptor in the space" because we make it easy for retailers to provide clear instructions, monitor work and track the quality of each project.

When you see improved response times for each task and help ticket along with more consistent compliance, you get the result you demand from your business. ThinkTime is the answer.

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