



Achieving Operational Excellence

Extreme Networks for Retail

Introduction

Similar to how retailers are revamping the role of brick and mortar stores, to enhance and personalize the in-store experience, the operations and assets supporting the retail business are transforming as well. Retailers are using IT solutions to ensure critical business uptime, while streamlining and augmenting traditional workflows – what is referred to as achieving Operational Excellence in Retail.

For both internal and customer-facing environments, retailers require continuous support and uptime of all critical business assets and operations, in addition to identifying strategic ways to optimize traditional workflows that result in greater efficiencies, lower costs, and improved customer outcomes. Retail business cannot afford to see a drop in service – especially during peak seasons and peak business hours – that would result in loss of revenue and/or a poor customer experience. Equally important, operational excellence allows retailers to embrace digital transformation and innovation by ‘working smarter,’ or offloading routine, everyday tasks via automation.

Critical Technology Challenges and Core Competencies

Maintaining Critical Uptime of all Operations

Retailers and their supporting operations – including the assets, staff, devices, and systems responsible for running the business – cannot afford a compromise or drop in service. This includes customer-facing environments like brick and mortar stores, and back-of-house environments like warehouses, distribution centers, and loading docks.

The smooth and secure upkeep of these environments poses significant challenges, and the business’ IT network solution has an indispensable role in this task. For guest-facing, in-store deployments the pressure to deliver an enhanced, personalized shopping experience has only increased with the rise of online retailers. This includes providing reliable Wi-Fi, with seamless mobile onboarding and roaming, and a central management platform to ensure the network is properly maintained and secured – in many cases, for a large number of distributed locations.

The back-of-house side of the businesses comprises of extensive storage and shipping facilities that require complete coverage and capacity despite their massive, cavernous environments. They also extend outdoors, have a range of temperatures, and support a diverse set of in-house applications and devices.

Complete Security, Visibility, Tracking of all Inventory and Assets

Retailers must be able to successfully understand and control business inventory and its supporting assets, and then document these processes to identify greater efficiencies for improved outcomes and cost-savings. If a business doesn't have detailed, real-time visibility into available inventory at a given location it can strain a business' sales and/or impact customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the retail supply chain often needs to track and manage inventory from multiple warehouses, stores, or locations - a difficult task especially if the business systems aren't centrally connected.

Security is a major consideration and a potential point of weakness for business operations as well. Innovative technologies like IoT has compelling benefits for a retailer's operational assets and their supporting systems, but with more and more connected (and unknown) users, devices, and 'things' in these environments, it creates more vulnerability for the business and its customers. Retailers must not only see who and what are in their environments, they must also be able to securely enable and protect against them too.

Improving Operational Efficiency through Automation and Data Analytics

Maintaining uptime is critical for retailers, but that doesn't mean IT staff and their budgets need to be weighed down by burdensome, day-to-day network administration and troubleshooting. In fact, recent industry reports indicate that most retail enterprises spend 80% of their IT budgets "keeping the lights on," and only 20% on innovation projects.

To combat this dynamic, retailers are now employing automation in their environments via artificial intelligence and machine learning, allowing them to offload mundane, day-to-day administrative tasks. Companies are also turning to predictive analytics, which optimize and make advanced forecasts about the supply chain and customer behaviors, by reading algorithms on both current and historical datasets to guide future decisions, and to free up valuable time, budget, and mindshare for more innovative projects.

Flexibility, Adaptability, and Scalability for an Evolving Business

Retailers today must scale relationships and collaboration through building a network of API-driven, interconnected ecosystems. Connections between partners, employees and even competitors are built into ecosystems that can unlock value for all; a network solution that easily interoperates with other strategic platforms is required to meet all these needs.

Retail businesses require digital platforms that are flexible and adaptable, engineered to scale from the smallest networks to the largest geographically dispersed deployments. The architecture should be tailored to the specific needs of the organization, and retailers may need to leverage a variety of network configurations: cloud-based, on premise, or a mixture of both. As the business and its physical environments evolve, it's essential retailers avoid locking into one architecture or deployment model, so new tools or systems are integrated into the business without a drop in critical service and keeping a consistent user experience.

Enhancing and Empowering the Role of the Physical Workforce

Similar to how the systems and processes powering the organization's operations are shifting, retailer's supporting staff are transforming as well. Retail businesses are now establishing high-performing digital workplaces, by leveraging existing and emerging technologies to improve and expand the role of supporting staff. This includes every aspect of the business, from in-store sales associates, to warehouse staff, to connected devices and assets.

Conclusion

With Extreme's purpose-built networking solutions, retailers can achieve Operational Excellence through the support and guaranteed uptime of all critical business assets and operations, while strategically optimizing traditional work flows that result in greater efficiencies, lower costs, and improved customer outcomes.

Additional Resources

To learn more please visit the [Retail Solution Center](#).

Retailers are able to converge network services on a single operating platform with scalable, flexible, software-driven infrastructure, with flexible deployment models that adapts with evolving business needs. This enables enhanced visibility of inventory and assets, digital empowerment of the physical workforce, and the ability to automate and offload maintenance-level, routine tasks with artificial intelligence and machine learning. All without compromising a quality user experience.