

maintel 



# The “New Normal”: Preparing for Unprecedented Peaks in a New World of Retail

**AVAYA** Edge<sup>SM</sup>  
Diamond

---

The UK retail market has always been competitive, but more so today than ever before. The high street is under more pressure than ever from online giants as customer's expect the latest products at the very best prices to always be available in-store or at the touch of a button online. Maintel and Avaya bring a wealth of experience working within the retail sector and understand what it means for our customers to remain competitive in an ever-changing market where digital transformation is quickly separating the winners from losers.

For all retail organisations, managing peak periods such as Christmas, Black Friday, and Cyber Monday, is one of their biggest challenges. Even more so now that other national celebrations such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, have become another excuse to shop. Depending on the type of products a retailer sells, they may also see peaks at other times of the year in-line with customer interests. A garden centre, for instance, would find March – July to be particularly busy.

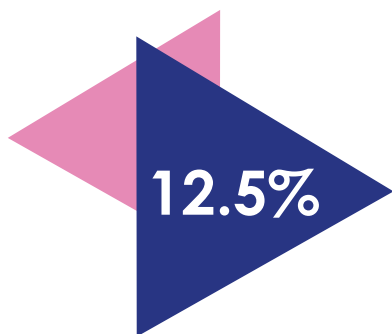
Both Maintel and Avaya know that preparing for these peaks has been standard practise for our retail customers for years, but now retail organisations are faced with new challenges to keep in mind and adapt to when it comes to peaks in retail.

## Shopping Has Changed

Retailers must now account for the fact that consumer habits have drastically changed when preparing to stay ahead of the peak curves. Gone are the days when shoppers would turn to high streets stores to simply meet their retail needs. Consumers now want to 'try before they buy' and have an experience.

Online shopping continues to rise in popularity. With a plethora of digital options at our fingertips, it is unsurprising that consumers are drawn to the ease, competitive pricing, and convenience of eCommerce.

The high street hasn't met with the end just yet, however. Consumers are still visiting stores, but with the objective to seek advice and try items out before eventually making the purchase online. Though it remains clear that different generations of UK consumers all care about happiness both in-store and online.



**Online specialist Ocado increased its sales by 12.5% proving that despite economic fears, surrounding trade conditions and anxiety around Brexit, eCommerce continues to grow.**

**(Avaya 2020)**

In-store, consumers anticipate an experience over convenience; something tangible that can be shared with friends and family. This desire for a personable and sharable experience is a symptom of the emergence of social platforms, such as Instagram or Pinterest, as a marketplace. Online, customers expect a seamless, connected, intuitive, and immediate digital experience.

Take, for example, the pop-up-shop installation, Gross Domestic Product, that graffiti artist Banksy unveiled in Croydon, UK in 2019. The public queued throughout the night to get a peek at the visual only pop-up, and purchases could only be made online.

It's not just the natural evolution of retail resources and technology that's driving changing consumer behaviour, however.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and necessary lockdown and isolation measures many governments worldwide introduced, resulted in atypical market conditions and consumer buying patterns. The demand in eCommerce has been increasing. There has been a 74% growth in online shopping since COVID-19 began, with 45% of UK adults having received more parcel deliveries during lockdown than ever before, [according to research](#).

***“Going forward, suppliers should accept that the pre-COVID-19 world has gone forever, and expectations will now be based around demand in the “new normal”***

John Perry, Managing Director, SCALA

Even with unprecedented events continually unfolding, [2020 has already outperformed](#) 2019 peak shopping periods when it comes to orders, revenue, and unique shoppers. Much as it has done in terms of homeworking, COVID-19 has introduced a “new normal” for retailers, shoppers, and the associated peaks.

## The “New Normal”

The impact of COVID-19, along with changing consumer behaviour, has resulted in new and previously unanticipated peaks for online channels, that doesn't look to change for the foreseeable future. As such, retailers will need to prepare for such peaks in the face of ongoing change and uncertainty.

Whilst the impact of managing peaks is felt across the entire business - with significant changes required in terms of operations, supply chain, and stock – retail contact centres, in particular, see huge implications. Constant shopping and sales have meant many contact centres are rolling from one “new normal” peak to another.

This increase in consumer engagement during peaks equates to an increased workload for contact centre agents. But it remains vital, considering the significance consumers place on customer experience - both online and in-store - that these agents are able to provide a winning customer experience.

So, what can retailers do to best prepare and support their contact centre agents to not only survive peak periods, but thrive?

### Timely Delivery

Is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important factor in consumers buying decision

(Avaya 2020)

81%

Of UK customers want accurate stock information

(Avaya 2020)

### Back-office Errors

And delays are the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest influence of customer (dis)satisfaction

(Avaya 2020)

1 in 3

UK customers have stopped using a retailer because of poor service

(Avaya 2020)

## Embrace a Digital-led Model

Technology can help overcome the key challenges retail organisations may face when equipping their contact centres during peak periods or when preparing for the next unprecedented peak cycle. Digital transformation is going a long way in enabling the next-gen retail experience, and retailers need to pivot to a digital-led model if they want to keep up with new peaks.

For retailers that haven't prioritised their online presence, now is the time to embrace digital transformation and focus on online commerce, digital marketing, and an omni-channel service.

### Conversation is Key

This is the age of the conversational interface. Reduce your agent's workload, whilst providing a connected, intuitive and immediate experience for your customers with easy-to-use conversational multi-channel interfaces. Take virtual assistants, for example, customers are able to interact naturally with the organisation in a seamless way, and if the query is too complex it can be escalated to an agent as necessary.

### Data is Invaluable

Making the most of data-driven technology will help retailers remain competitive in the 'New Normal'. Whether it's leveraging data from increased online shopping to drive personalised marketing, or increasing the use of voice or chatbots, retailers can gain valuable insights to help better prepare for peaks and delight those returning customers.

A graphic consisting of a dark blue triangle pointing to the right, with a pink triangle pointing to the left, partially overlapping the blue one. The text "7 in 10" is written in white inside the blue triangle.

7 in 10

**UK retail employees say better collaboration tech would make them more productive**

(Avaya 2020)

A graphic consisting of a dark blue triangle pointing to the right, with a pink triangle pointing to the left, partially overlapping the blue one. The text "6.3 in 10" is written in white inside the blue triangle.

6.3 in 10

**Retail employees say AI to help manage work and predict best next action would be valuable**

(Avaya 2020)