5 Benefits Of Cloud-Based Mobile Retail Solutions:
Aligning Retail Teams To Enhance Analytics And Streamline Operations Across All Stores
Executive Summary

This white paper outlines the key benefits of analytics-driven, mobile cloud-based retail solutions that can:

• Optimize inventory management, marketing and merchandising;
• Build product and brand integrity across stores;
• Boost operational efficiency;
• Improve field services and store team engagement; and
• Maximize vendor compliance.

As competition heats up for store-based retailers — from other brick-and-mortar competitors as well as online players — retailers can’t afford operational missteps. By optimizing business processes across all stores, retailers can boost overall revenue by optimizing inventory management, building brand integrity and improving vendor compliance to make better overall business decisions.

Now, mobile solutions are catalyzing that change by redefining store audit programs. Store audits have long been a critical retail function designed to maximize operational efficiency, maintain merchandise consistency and enhance the shopping experience — from ensuring optimal product pricing to on-shelf availability.

Forward-thinking retailers are now empowering their field service teams with mobile cloud-based solutions that bring automation and business intelligence to store audits. They’re transforming manual processes with dynamic digital tools that tap real-time analytics to boost store performance, protect brand equity and drive growth.
“Traditional paper audits are slow, subject to human error and time-consuming for merchandisers to conduct,” noted Anita Constantino, Global Retail Lead, Acumen Solutions, Inc. By contrast, web-based mobile tools track product availability, merchandising compliance, store promotion execution and more. They can deliver real-time reports that measure performance and pinpoint areas for improvement; these reports can be shared among field service staff, vendors and retail headquarters within minutes, rather than weeks.

This immediate feedback loop enables field service reps and merchant teams to make informed in-store changes on the fly based on up-to-the-minute analytics, in order to maximize sales and conversion rates.

The payoffs are real. Retailers have tracked concrete gains by upgrading from manual paper audits to mobile audits. Field service reps can potentially conduct as many as 30% more store audits via digital means and do so twice as fast, which in turn can generate reports up to eight times faster than paper audits.¹

¹ The Safety Culture Blog, The ROI of Digital Audits, April 2017

Optimize Inventory Management, Marketing And Merchandising

Mobile digital audits provide retailers with a holistic, standardized and dynamic real-time view of myriad factors that impact success:

- Inventory levels;
- Display;
- Pricing;
- Marketing;
- Merchandising;
- Orders;
- Returns; and
- The competitive landscape.

This holistic view empowers retailers to make quick, nimble decisions across their store fleet in ways that were not possible via traditional manual systems.
Build Product And Brand Integrity Across Stores

In the modern shopping era, upholding product and brand integrity has become infinitely more complex for merchants that are spreading their wings across wholesale, retail, licensing and digital channels — all while competing with the ultimate purveyor of the endless aisle: Amazon.

In their bid to meet the demands of today’s digitally savvy consumers, and respond to a multi-channel, 24-hour shopping landscape, retailers are tapping cloud-based mobile solutions powered by analytics to enable smart, timely in-store decisions by merchandising, marketing and inventory planning teams.

Inventory management accuracy, for one, has gained heightened importance among retailers as exponentially more products are flowing through the supply chain via e-Commerce.

These days, losses from overstocks and stockouts cost retailers an estimated $1.75 trillion every year.²

To mitigate those losses, retailers are leveraging mobile audit reports for smarter inventory planning, backed by real-time information on stock levels and vendor feedback, on demand. Mobile store audits generate granular, multidimensional insights on the inventory picture chainwide, offering immediate visibility into key factors. These include:

- Out-of-stock levels on key products, ensuring that there is sufficient inventory on hand to support prominently displayed styles;
- Insight on slow-moving goods;
- Data on items that are seeing an uptrend in returns; and
- Demand for product re-orders.

All this inventory insight goes hand in hand with business intelligence derived from marketing and merchandising solutions — the heart and soul of any commerce operation.

Retailers get actionable feedback across the store fleet on the performance of new campaigns, promotions and events — be it a product launch or a pop-up shop — while ensuring that vendor marketing programs are clearly displayed and communicated to shoppers, and that visual merchandising and store floor plans are optimized.

At the same time, mobile store audits measure the effectiveness of product pricing and placement, while delivering insight into competitor prices and sales events. These functionalities are critical today as shoppers compare prices in-store from their smartphones.

² IHL Group, Retailers and the Ghost Economy: $1.75 Trillion Reasons to Be Afraid, May 2015
Today, a hefty 18 cents of every retail dollar earned is spent on fulfilling online orders. As the cost of running an online business places pressure on legacy retailers’ profit margins, merchants are placing a greater premium on streamlining operations to boost the bottom line.

Indeed, 67% of retailers consider overall business operations efficiency to be of high or critical importance, but only 27% deem themselves equipped to manage this well, according to a study on digital industry strategies by Forrester Consulting, commissioned by Software AG.

Mobile applications are becoming critical to a retailer’s toolbox when it comes to getting its operational house in order.

Merchants are turning to mobile solutions to automate processes and weave unprecedented business intelligence throughout the retail ecosystem, from the warehouse — where workers use mobile devices to increase the speed and accuracy of order picking — to the store floor via digital audits.

Cloud-based mobile audits can optimize the cross-functional efforts of retail field service, marketing and inventory teams, for example, by automating the reporting and sharing of information on setting up a seasonal fixture or re-pricing an item amid an unexpected “price war.”

Just as mobile solutions are starting to deliver operational improvements for multiple industries — companies gain an average of 240 hours of work per year due to employees using mobile applications — mobile audits are saving field service staff hours they had previously spent using manual tools and processes.

In one example, with the implementation of a solution built by Acumen Solutions on the Salesforce platform, a prominent retail shoe brand was able to deliver a scalable and expandable store-audit solution that supported business change and growth over time. The solution also delivered a standardized, consolidated view across store audits and vendor performance to support the company’s business goals and objectives (see Success Story sidebar on page 7).
Improve Field Services and Store Team Engagement

Many retail field service staff and store teams today still use outdated manual tools to manage inventory across hundreds of stores, putting brand integrity at risk in a hypercompetitive multichannel shopping landscape.

In this digitally altered retail environment, cloud-based mobile technology solutions are redefining training and task management for field service staff to boost both worker productivity and the customer shopping experience.

“To thrive in today’s challenging landscape, retailers need to leverage their greatest asset, the store associate, to deliver experiences their shoppers love. This means helping associates to spend less time on operational tasks and more time delivering delightful experiences to in-store shoppers,” noted Maria Humphrey, Director, Retail Industry Solutions, Salesforce.

By empowering field service staff, these platforms equip retailers to strategize, plan, streamline, evaluate and improve audit processes across their network of stores, and foster a culture of operational and service efficiency, integrity and accountability.

It’s a sign of the times. When it comes to task management and staff training, 89% of retailers plan to offer mobile solutions to associates within three years, including associate-facing mobile services such as product information, floor set configurations and planograms.

As Acumen Solutions’ Constantino explained, mobile auditing solutions drive standardized workflow and tasks, ensuring that field service reps maintain accuracy and data integrity while enabling them to view and manage audits by regional stores and locations more quickly, all from their phone, tablet or other mobile device.

These mobile tools also enable faster training and onboarding of field service staff, generating reports that highlight key training areas and performance.

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-Maria Humphrey,
Salesforce

5 BRP Consulting, The Mobile World of Retail, 2017
Challenge
The company was seeking to replace an existing field service representative tool for its retail brands, including multiple shoe businesses. The customer wanted to boost operational efficiency for field service reps and merchants as well as internal business associates, to execute key audit tasks and goals via simple, mobile access to data.

Solution
The customer implemented a Mobile Store Operations System, built by Acumen Solutions on the Salesforce platform. The mobile solution was deployed for the brand’s retail field service reps and sales teams. The rollout called for FSR teams to engage with a mobile audit tool to conduct brand and inventory audits to hundreds of stores across the enterprise.

The cloud-based mobile solution was designed to offer a single, data-driven view of vendor audits per store. It enabled the implementation of key follow-up tasks based on audit findings — from replenishing product on a store’s end cap to changing out a seasonal promotion — in a bid to optimize inventory management for its brand, and maximize in-store brand displays.

Key offline and mobile data capture allowed auditors to record their store findings on-site in real time, and synchronize that data seamlessly on the Salesforce platform.

The tool provided heightened visibility into key performance metrics such as on-shelf availability via a single mobile device. A dashboard provided high-level analytics, such as the average out-of-stock ratio at partnering retail chains.

The solution also enabled both vendors and retailers to optimize in-store brand displays by applying data and insights from auditors’ findings to correct or prevent mistakes or to enhance merchandising — from marketing messaging and seasonal displays to product pricing and placement. Audit results were aligned with both corrective actions and preventive action processes.

Results
The Salesforce mobile solution delivered a scalable and expandable store-audit solution that supported business change and growth over time, as well as a standardized, consolidated view across store audits and vendor performance to support the company’s business goals and objectives.
Maximize Vendor Compliance

The retail/vendor relationship is how shopping comes to life. The effectiveness of that partnership — or lack thereof — relies heavily on ensuring that product placement, displays, pricing and promotion, among other factors, are executed as agreed between suppliers and retailers in the store.

Meeting brand, inventory and product compliance standards is critical to maintaining retail relationships, performance and sales. Mobile auditing solutions automate and streamline the process by eliminating hours spent by field service reps on manual tracking and collaboration processes.

For example, with a solution built by Acumen Solutions on the Salesforce platform, a retail shoe brand has been able to prevent in-store merchandising and marketing errors by applying data and insights from auditors’ findings. Both vendors and retail merchandisers are better able to plan marketing messaging, seasonal displays, product pricing and placement (see Success Story sidebar on previous page).

These digital audits enable retail suppliers to receive timely data on inventory, branding, marketing and store service so that compliance standards are met, maintained and improved upon via analytics from audit performance reports.

Mobile auditing tools today can even capture photos, allowing vendors to see precisely what’s afoot at each retail location. So, if a vendor’s Fourth of July apparel presentation is missing key accessories in a particular retail market — a display requirement specifically outlined in a compliance agreement — the issue can be swiftly spotted and corrected.

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Conclusion

The competitive stakes are higher than ever for brick-and-mortar retailers, fueled by a $335 billion e-Commerce market that has created a highly demanding consumer who enjoys limitless shopping choices.  

To survive and thrive, legacy retailers need to bring their “A” game in the era of the digitally savvy, empowered shopper.

Smart merchants are upgrading from manual store audits to mobile cloud-based digital auditing tools to streamline operations by optimizing chainwide business processes.

By equipping their field service teams with mobile solutions that bring unprecedented automation and business intelligence to store audits, retailers are poised to:

- Gain a holistic, standardized and real-time view of in-store success factors, from inventory levels, merchandising and marketing to the competitive landscape;
- Eliminate timely manual audits and reduce errors via analytics-driven store changes based on real-time data, to maximize sales and conversion rates;
- Enrich brand and product integrity across a fleet of stores with granular, actionable insights on everything from the sales performance of a merchandise display to the market-wide pricing of a hot item; and
- Boost worker productivity and performance by equipping field service teams with mobile tools that increase operational and service efficiency and accountability.

Forrester, Brief: Digital Touchpoint Investments Significantly Influence US Retail Sales, January 2016

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contact@acumensolutions.com
www.acumensolutions.com

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1.888.603.3626
info@retailtouchpoints.com