Gavin Peacock, chief executive of TRC Solutions

Connecting customers to all retail channels

BY DANIELLE RYAN

The relationship between customers and retailers is changing. Customers are more knowledgeable than ever before. Online reviews, direct social media contact with brands and the power to influence widely have shifted the balance in the relationship – and now it's the customers with the upper hand.

With customers connecting and purchasing through various different channels – web, mobile and in-store – businesses are increasingly finding that the technologies they use need to be linked and integrated to avoid the inefficiency created by using fragmented and outdated systems. That integrated or 'omni-channel' approach brings all the information the retailer needs into one place to drive sales and efficiency.

Dublin-based IT service company TRC Solutions understands the power of connectivity and how it can affect a company's bottom line. The firm offers various digital solutions, including one called the Digital Store Platform, which unites all the digital systems in the retail environment into one master database.

"It allows businesses to collect all social, transactional, purchasing, accounts in one system – but it also allows them to be able to communicate with customers in a more seamless way," said chief executive Gavin Peacock.

If a customer purchases an item online and tries to return it in a physical store, for example, the retailer should have systems in place that allow that customer to get their refund in the store, rather than having to resend an item back in the post, Peacock said.

What has happened is that as ideas evolved, retailers found themselves with a number of different disjointed systems for different things – point of sale (EPOS), accounts, e-commerce, mobile etc – and through necessity, because you can't just throw everything away, companies kept adding bolt-on solutions, which complicated processes rather than simplifying them.

TRC's iVend solution offers a virtual ecosystem where all the various elements of retail are connected and responsive, and the business gets to choose which bits they want and which bits they don't need.

"You can slot them all in and they all talk to each other," Peacock said.

TRC is also working on new radio frequency identification (RFID) self-checkout systems, which allow the customer to check out without having to queue. In fact, the traditional EPOS system – someone standing behind a counter – is going to become less common, Peacock said.

"The physical counter – if the trends in the US are to be followed – will become a thing of the past."

Even so, person-to-person contact is still important. The solution will be something like a "configurable screen that can be used by a customer or a salesperson and that's familiar and easy to use," he said.

As much as it is about value, retailing is becoming about experience and doing things that are going bring people into the bricks and mortar stores.

"For instance, we're working on RFID shelves – so you can pick up an item and put it on the shelf and all the information about the item will come up; all the reviews, price comparisons etc – retailing is going to become more of an experience, and the ICT will have to follow," Peacock said.

Convergence is key for VisionID

BY DANIELLE RYAN

Investments in ICT must be aimed at running a business more fluidly and must provide not just one, but multiple benefits that, in the end of the day, help an organisation attract and retain more customers. That's according to Padraic O'Brien, national retail account manager for technology company VisionID, which has been at the forefront of the 'Internet of Things' and radio frequency identification (RFID) for the past decade.

The core of the Clonmel-based company's business is barcode scanning, label printing, mobile computer and wireless networks.

At the centre of everything it does is the mission to connect to the customer, enable staff to be more productive and empower the IT department to keep all these operations running smoothly, according to O'Brien.

"The world is changing, and it's doing so at an astonishing pace. Connect the value of your company, its brand and what it stands for with like-minded customers, make this simple through clever technology and watch your sales grow." he said.

VisionID offers a retail technology suite which seeks to problem solve from end-to-end; from backend warehouse and supply chain to front-of-house instore.

That involves offering solutions for facilities management, electronic proof of delivery, mobile handhelds and printers, wireless infrastructure, in-store transactions, communications and electronic point-of-sale (EPOS) touchscreen systems. VisionID is also experimenting with 'beaconing'

Padraic O'Brien, national retail account manager for technology company VisionID

technology – a proximity-based form of mobile engagement which can track customers' shopping behaviours online and in stores, sending offers as people shop.

"Beaconing is a relatively new technology. We are beginning a pilot to test the technology in retail.

We have placed mobile devices with retailers to allow stocktaking and price markdown in combination with mobile printing of shelf edge labelling," O'Brien said.

"These are the bread-and-butter basics that need to be implemented to allow efficiencies and share information to staff and customers alike."

Customers are increasingly shopping online and using mobile devices as part of their shopping experience, but at the same time people still enjoy browsing in the physical stores.

The solution is convergence, O'Brien said – bringing all the various ways customers browse and buy together into a seamless and easy process for both the customer and the business.

"Beacons are a large part of this omnichannel experience for the customer," O'Brien said.

Retailers need to learn how to please the customer through the channels in which they engage, and deliver the ultimate superior experience of their brand," he said.

> " Connect the value of your company, its brand, and what it stands for with like-minded customers

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COMMERCIAL PROFILE: **Kelsius**

Kelsius FoodCheck being introduced by Musgrave retailers

FoodCheck by Kelsius, a cloud-based food safety monitoring system, is to be introduced to the SuperValu and Centra store network

Kelsius, the food safety monitoring technology firm headquartered in Donegal is to offer its revolutionary new FoodCheck technology to SuperValu and Centra stores.

Once adopted by retailers, this has the potential value of €2 million over the next 12 months. The FoodCheck system replaces the current industry standard paper-based manual monitoring and record keeping, helping to provide immediate operational savings to stores and allowing staff to spend more time in direct customer interaction.

Commenting on the contract, Eamonn Quinn, executive chairman of Kelsius said: "Food safety is the most important issue for any company operating in food retail as the reputation of a brand can be irreparably damaged through just one major incident. Our cloud-based technology enables food retailers replace existing onerous paper-based check systems and save time and money while implementing the very best solution for food chain management.

"The recorded information is available immediately as it is needed and reduces the possibility of human error in the recording of data as well as providing precise data for management. We are delighted to partner with SuperValu and Centra, helping us become the retail industry standard for excellence in food safety monitoring."

Ray Bowe, Head of Food Safety and Quality for SuperValu and Centra said: "Implementing rigorous food safety and quality controls is fundamental to SuperValu and Centra. This new to market Kelsius FoodCheck system ensures excellence in food safety monitoring and we are delighted to be able to offer this to our retail partners. This innovative system helps us continue to offer the highest standards of food safety and quality to our shoppers that they have come to expect."

Kelsius's FoodCheck technology replaces the current paper-based systems that require repetitive manual monitoring and record keeping.

The system utilises systematic and preventative regimes meaning that the industry standard HACCP processes are fully followed and that nothing is left to chance in the hugely important area of food safety.

All data is stored electronically. Alerts of non-conformance are generated automatically by the system and sent as text messages to supervisors/ managers. Ultimately, this results in a more efficient and cost-effective process allowing staff to spend more time on customer service in customer facing roles as opposed to 'behind the scenes' in convenience stores, restaurants, hotels, fast-food outlets or catering companies.

Let Kelsius help you improve your retail business by saving you time and money, contact us at:
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Ray Bowe, Head of Food Safety and Quality for SuperValu and Centra and Eamonn Quinn of Kelsius putting the cloud based FoodCheck technology through its paces

About Kelsius

Headquartered in Donegal, Kelsius develops and supplies computer-based automation for implementing food safety rules and regulations and compliance for hospitality and retail sectors and for the hospital sector. Utilising its world-class wireless sensor technology and cloud-based data hosting and processing, the Kelsius system improves food safety and compliance as well as reducing the labour associated with these activities. Kelsius systems are used in food services and hospitality outlets across Ireland as well as in pharmacies and blood banks in more than 100 hospitals and NHS trusts in Ireland and Britain.

Kelsius.com

KELSIUS

FoodCheck
Complete Food Safety Control

Kelsius provides cutting edge food safety systems to retailers big and small

Kelsius designs and manufactures cutting-edge systems for wireless temperature monitoring systems for the food service and healthcare industries. These web-based temperature monitoring systems provide complete visibility of compliance across an organisation and do so efficiently to improve product quality, significantly lower costs and remove mountains of paperwork for the retailer allowing staff to spend more time in customer facing roles. Kelsius clients include retail and food service businesses of all shapes and sizes.

H2 Group
Forecourt Retailing

Spar Express Listowel, H2 Group

H2 Group owns and operates a network of convenience stores and service stations around Ireland. Providing a reliable, cost effective, fully automated approach to HACCP management and complying with all food safety regulations was the obstacle presented to H2 Group managing director Sean Heaphey.

"FoodCheck benefits us by offering complete visibility of all our HACCP records. We feel safe in the knowledge that all our records are accurate and secure. The system reduces the amount of time staff have to spend on HACCP recording and makes life much easier during audit or inspection. It helps us protect both our customers and our brand, offering actual cost savings in the process.

Also, the task management module has streamlined our processes and improved accountability and visibility across the stores. We are now fully committed to rolling out the FoodCheck system across all H2 sites."

THE CHURCH.ie

The Church, Jervis Street, Dublin

Running two kitchens serving four dining areas in one of Dublin's busiest venues can cause serous logistical issues. Dave Balfe, executive head chef at the Church Bar and Restaurant, was tasked with making operations as efficient as possible.

"Here at the Church with our food service offerings being available in the Gallery, the Bar, the Cellar and in the Garden and being prepared and served from two kitchens we can experience some logistical challenges in keeping our standards at the height that our customers have come to expect and demand.

"We installed the Kelsius system about a year ago and have found it to be a huge support to both staff and management. Kelsius has provided us with a straightforward solution to an integral part of our business, while conserving time and cost savings. Health and safety is of paramount importance to us here at the Church and the Kelsius system has really maximised our efficiency in this regard."

Kelsius FoodCheck system utilises tablet technology to save records seamlessly in the cloud, saving on administration and enabling real time checks without trawling through paperwork

Applegreen

Kelsius FoodCheck technology is now being used across the expanding Applegreen network with the FoodCheck system replacing the current industry standard paper-based labour intensive manual monitoring and record keeping.

Commenting on the contract, Eamonn Quinn, executive chairman at Kelsius said: "Food Safety is a huge issue for all food vendors and Kelsius's FoodCheck technology utilises systematic and preventative regimes, meaning that the industry standard HACCP processes are fully followed and that nothing is left to chance".

Joe Barrett, chief operations officer at Applegreen, said: "We at Applegreen are delighted to be using Kelsius FoodCheck technology. We pride ourselves on our customer service and innovative food options, whether in our small local stations or in our larger motorway service areas. It's important that our staff spend as much time as possible in customer-facing roles and the FoodCheck technology ensures that the hugely important area of food safety management is managed with meticulous attention to detail, but without the onerous hours of paper reporting and filing. As an independent Irish company we were delighted to be supporting another growing Irish company, which came up with the perfect solution for Applegreen."

THE MERRION DUBLIN

The Merrion Hotel, Dublin

The Merrion Hotel is one of Ireland's top five-star hotels. With two Michelin stars and countless other accolades, quality of food is paramount to executive chef Ed Cooney. Maintaining their reputation and removing risk was the challenge facing Cooney and his staff. FoodCheck allowed them to streamline HACCP processes and concentrate on the quality of food they produce.

"The Kelsius FoodCheck system gives me complete peace of mind. I now know that good food safety processes are being followed and that information and records are at my fingertips to demonstrate compliance and traceability should problems arise," said Cooney.

"The cost saving element is also significant as the system performs tasks which were previously done manually including fridge temperature monitoring. We simply could not operate without the Kelsius system."

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