

Out of time or transforming the old with the new? Retail today

The bricks and mortar retail industry has, like many traditional industries, felt the hand of father time on its shoulder of late. The internet and new consumer devices have changed the way that we shop, so retailers have to change the way they engage, sell and support their customers. Tony Hughes looks at how some are adapting better than others.

The likes of Sainsbury's and Tesco are now data-centric companies, from how they track their supply chain to accounting inventory and marketing to their customers. As with other traditional sectors their competitors now are no longer just other retailers but tech companies who are looking at global markets they can disrupt, by improving the convenience for the consumer and how they shop.

Cross cutting technologies such as Machine Learning, Cloud, Big Data and Immersive Technologies are being used to improve efficiencies, customer satisfaction and support. The next tech revolutions are appearing in the guise of blockchain and digital payments, and changing the industry faster than ever before.

For all upwardly mobile companies in retail, they need to be active in markets

where there are not only high spending consumers but also a surfeit of technologies and talent. Key for such companies, is attracting new customers, utilising new technologies and integrating them across new business models.

The UK is fortunate in having all these ingredients for the Retail sector, which is why it has attracted more retail tech startups and financing than any other country in Europe.

COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on Retail priorities

The pandemic has laid bare the flaws in the operating model of most, if not all, of the traditional retailers in the UK. They are ill equipped to pivot their business model to the online world and reducing their physical touchpoints to their customers. COVID-19 has forced retailers to try and fast track 20 years of technical and process innovation into 3 months and most are struggling.

In order to compete against or utilise the Amazon model to their benefit, UK retailers need to 'buy in' practical innovation from smaller, more agile and tech focused companies. They existed around the world but retailers do not know where to find them or how to engage them.

UK retailers need to not just re-imagine their digital offering but fast track it's transformation. They need to do this now, otherwise throughout the various phases of this pandemic in the next 2 years and others possibly to come, they will be left behind.

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[10 retailtech companies to follow in 2020](#)

Supplying transformative innovation to retailers

For many retailers the UK has become a shopping ground for new technologies and talent. Encapsulated by organisations such as [True](#), [Validify](#) and [Lmarks](#) who run accelerator and open corporate programmes to match fast moving

tech startups to retailers. UK retailers will need a constant input of the latest technologies to help the pivot and upgrade their business models from a physical focus to a more response digital play.

Now we have heard various noises about returning to the past, as if somehow the past was a) better b) preserved in aspic and c) desirable to those of us fully conscious in the now. How is Mary Portas going to reinvent the High Street without understanding technology? Does she understand what code is bringing to social situations? Absolutely not.

According to Deloitte, retailers require these necessary skills for proper digital transformation:

Technological savvy

UX design

Business acumen

Collaborative processes

Entrepreneurial spirit

Agile structure

It requires significant investment. It needs a bit of all of this and there are plenty of people in decision-making roles in Retail who do not understand this. Because you can have quick wins, sometimes it does not require a big tech infrastructure plan. There are some lean, quick wins.

At [CityCurator](#) we help these retailers by identifying, connecting and bringing to the UK the most innovative technology companies capable of changing the face of UK retail. Helping the retailers and brands to make the digital transformation a reality and keep their businesses on the growth path and ready for the next generation of consumers.

Providing such valuable and relevant collaborators for UK retailers will make

them more robust and able to expand into international markets more easily. The COVID-19 pandemic will push all countries to reassess how that latest technologies will add value to their economies – a key aspect of this will be how we are able to connect the most innovative technology companies to the UK that add value to existing UK companies.

In the case of the Retail sector this is a must, as the clock is ticking for business as usual.

Tony Hughes is a serial entrepreneur and advisor to the UK's Department for International Trade on overseas expansion. He is co-founder of CityCurator.co.uk, a new online location comparison site for globally mobile entrepreneurs and corporates.

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