

## Why JobKeeper is not enough

Without more love for local independent retailers, some of Australia's much-loved businesses may fade away in the future



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## From survive to thrive: Tech-driven strategies to help Aussie retailers

‘Pivot’ is unofficially the most overused word of the year, but indeed, the pandemic has forced many retailers to adopt new strategies to shift their businesses into the future. *By Stephen Moore*

According to the Retail in Australia Covid-19 Country Impact Report, the total Australian retail market is expected to decrease by 3.2 per cent in 2020 versus the previous forecast of 2.7 per cent growth. This means an estimated loss of AU\$17 billion as the country faces the reality of a recession for the first time in decades.

With advice from the Australian government changing daily, many retailers have had to constantly shift gears to adhere to restrictions, close and reopen store fronts and, for some, move from predominantly bricks-and-mortar business models to purely e-commerce. Those that have pivoted and altered how they service their customers have survived and even thrived during these volatile times.

Australia Post’s ‘Inside Australian Online Shopping 2020 eCommerce Industry Report’ found local e-commerce grew more than 80 per cent year on year in the eight weeks after the Covid-19 pandemic was declared by the World Health Organisation.

Omnichannel sales, communications, and a holistic approach to customer experience are increasingly becoming critical functions for today’s leading brands. Retail expert Steve Dennis has coined this approach to retail as ‘harmonised retail’. Essentially this model is about creating a holistic consumer experience through sales and communications channels.

Now more than ever, how we interact with consumers will be impacted forever; social distancing, hygiene, transmission

awareness, consideration, selflessness, empathy, and the importance of staying healthy are now even more critical for all of us. These social changes will also be as significant when it comes to the employee experience.

The good news is that the world of retail is certainly no stranger to change. Retail requires a resilient and innovative mindset – overcoming obstacles while navigating fashion and emerging trends is part of the recipe to stay relevant and successful.

Some technology-driven strategies highlighted below might help guide retailers through these uncertain times whilst preparing for future growth:

**Harmonise the employee experience:** The harmonised retail model can be applied to the employee experience. The engagement and demeanour of an organisation’s workforce will have an influence on customer perceptions of the retailer and its overall brand. Your people are your brand ambassadors and greatest assets even in virtual mode.

Workplaces that have the right software to help manage, pay, keep track of and take care of their people, are likely better equipped to manage the crisis because the employee experience is both brought into focus and simplified.

The benefit of this data-driven approach is the ability to predict needs, wants and trends ahead of the curve, applying intervention and innovation to the employee experience. Finding some harmony

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in the way people are managed can help inspire and motivate employees – even during times of crisis.

**Task management simplified through automation:** Automation – used well – can assist businesses in scaling up or down as necessary. Managers can be alerted to inefficiencies immediately, such as having too many or too few employees/skill sets scheduled to work at any point in time.

From what we have seen with the return to work thus far, new workforce tasks are quickly becoming the norm. This includes activities such as deep cleaning and sanitisation, re-stocking, re-skilling, and re-staffing. As a result, budgeting has become more complex with this shift in work and workers.

With effective task management technology in place, employers can quickly and successfully track that the right people with the right skills are scheduled for the needed tasks – to make sure these are done effectively and safely.

**Optimal and autonomous rostering:** The extension of programs like JobKeeper and JobSeeker will have an impact on how employers manage their payroll and ensure proper compliance. Advanced workforce technology software is beneficial to organisations, as schedule integrity and award compliance are

built into the software's algorithms. In addition, solutions today can auto-schedule an entire workforce while accounting for pay rates, available hours, tenure, skills, etc. to build optimal rosters. This can help avoid overtime and unforeseen penalty rate expenses.

Automation also gives employees a sense of autonomy by being able to manage their own rosters. They can swap shifts, update their availability and submit leave requests all without input from their managers. With effective rostering and the reduction of manual tasks, employees can feel more confident in their work schedules, and managers will have more time for more strategic activities.

**Upskilling and training:** Intuitive workforce learning technologies can help upskill employees and provide accessible information and training, such as Covid-19 health and safety guidelines. Whilst federal government initiatives, such as JobKeeper, have helped retailers retain some of their staff, other employees have had to find opportunities elsewhere, which means having to hire and train new staff quickly when re-opening those areas of the business.

How your business operates in the future may look different to pre-Covid and require different skill sets from your employees. Employers will have to act with agility and care to retain their current workforce by supporting their professional development within other areas fundamental to the growth of the business, and intuitive workforce learning technologies can help with this.

Business leaders are rightly focused on keeping their people safe. They also need to help them feel supported, connected, and discover new ways to work productively together, without compromising business continuity. It's critical that employees feel prepared and confident in the safety precautions and changing procedures they must follow when serving customers. This protects the employer, the employee and the customer. **IRW**

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Businesses could benefit from using software to help them roster staff and keep everyone safe and healthy in the office.