

Adapting the supply chain to the 'new normal'

By [Andrew Dawson](#)

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The supply chain, particularly in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry and especially in South Africa's main or informal market, has traditionally relied heavily on interpersonal contact for ordering and fulfilment. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the industry was literally turned on its head. Physical distance has become paramount when it comes to keeping staff safe and healthy, and the model of sales reps visiting stores simply for the purpose of taking orders became impossible.

Given the uncertainty that we face around the pandemic, it is prudent to embrace this 'new normal'. So how does the supply chain adapt? Mobile technology implementations offer a solution that not only addresses these challenges but also adds significant value to improve efficiency and line of sight throughout the value chain.



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Digital transformation to take the supply chain online

With the traditional means of engagement between salespersons and retailers off limits, demand for technology has accelerated in the wake of the pandemic. Arguably the most critical factor that has been highlighted is the need to take the consumer ecommerce experience to the supply chain, specifically enabling this transactional functionality between the retailer and the manufacturer.

The ordering process has had to be completely overhauled as sales reps are not able to visit stores to establish stock levels and to replenish. It has become essential to empower retailers to do this for themselves, and an ecommerce style platform is ideal, especially if it can be enabled for mobile. Not only does this ensure seamless continuity of orders, it is actually a step towards significantly improved efficiency. The mobility aspect is key, especially in South Africa, particularly when it comes to reaching spaza shop owners in the main market and consolidating order generation to a single point.

The entire supply chain can in fact be driven online, and mobile technology, supported by the call centre as a fundamental communication platform, can create a seamless and user-friendly experience. As an added benefit, this delivers enhanced line of sight from the manufacturer down to the retailer to drive insight and optimise efficiency.

Redefining roles to add more value

Aside from driving increased efficiency and enabling continuity in a disrupted world, mobile technology has the potential to add significant value. With face-to-face engagements reduced to the very minimum, it is important to maximise these in-person contacts. It is therefore essential to turn personal engagements into relationship building endeavours, rather than using them for the purpose of order generation.

Again, this is where mobile technology and an online ordering platform show their benefit. By empowering retailers to place orders digitally, sales reps can refocus their efforts to generating returns instead. While the pandemic forced acceleration of digital transformation, this is in fact the natural progression of technology that has existed for years. The pieces were all there, but Covid-19 provided the catalyst to bring them together.

Intelligent analytics unlocks insights for optimisation

Integrated mobility, enabled by cloud technology and supported by effective customer information centres, is driving the optimisation of the supply chain as well as route to market. Mobile app-based order generation builds a foundation for a digital ecosystem, which can then be utilised to build out interactive data sharing capabilities. Data lakes offer a repository for information for all of the various touch points in the supply chain, from manufacturing to warehousing, logistics to sales.

By bringing together these traditionally disparate data sources, analytics and AI can provide massive insight to help retailers better understand their customers and optimise the supply chain from start to finish.

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