



BLOG: Pandemic challenges and change for the retail industry

Based in London, ESP's Sales Account Manager, Simon Phillips, has spent his entire career in B2B sales mostly as a new business hunter and, in the last 25, years selling IT managed services and payment solutions. For the past decade, he has sold to the retail and retail hospitality sector, specialising in structuring solutions for tier 1 and 2 retailers both direct and through OEMs and system integrators.

In this blog Simon offers insight into the challenges the retail industry is facing, and how providers such as ESP are ready to support the changing environment the sector is having to manage.

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The Covid-19 pandemic has been a time of significant global change across many different industries. In a previous blog post we discussed the challenges faced by the aviation industry, but the retail and retail hospitality industries have also had to become incredibly resourceful and adapt to entirely new ways of trading.

Traditional EPOS remedial maintenance seems to have hardly changed over the past 15 years prior to the pandemic. As a result, many retailers have been caught unprepared for the lockdowns and limitations that came along with it.

Due to contracts which did not factor in long-term store closures and reduced function within limited lanes when trading resumed, retailers were stuck footing the bill for unused equipment, and received minimal discounts from suppliers.

Additionally, retail interactions with customers have also changed with the use of mobile POS, email receipts, and contactless payments. These changes take less of a toll on existing hardware, but have also created a need for the new technology which is becoming available such as queue busting and digital signage all of which need tailored support.

Typically, full-managed service contracts outsource all aspects of in-store support. This would cover the provision of spares and a uniform SLA across the estate, with fixes being undertaken by traditional field engineers. Often this includes swapping of "plug and play" parts, a job which has the capacity to be completed by a more affordable technical courier. These contracts often have the cost of buffer stock of spares built into the price. As a result, the residual financial benefit of this hardware is enjoyed by the service provider, rather than the retailer having both the residual value and the flexibility of ownership. As a tailored service provider ESP can offer retailers the option to own the spares, thus putting the financial benefit in the customer's favour.

ESP's expertise in retail

ESP is well positioned to structure tailored solutions to meet the real and specific needs of these customers post-pandemic. Some of these customisable solutions might include genuine European or global support, 1st line helpdesks, highbred field engineers, or technical courier options, offering quality and value to the end user.

Additionally, ESP has the flexibility to get the right SLAs against the right equipment and working out the right mix of traditional support with innovative ways of delivering the service in the most cost-effective way.

It would make sense to start looking at how your estate is supported in a new way, tailored to specific needs. Some of the things that can be explored include the following questions:

- Am I using all the lanes in the estate?
- Are the hours of cover the same?
- Are the contracted SLAs in line with the importance of the system?
- Does the SLA change during my peak trading?
- Am I paying for engineering when it should be technical courier?
- Has my service partner supported me through the pandemic?

Simon has joined ESP with over 25 years experience of solutioning field maintenance, and believes that our ability to provide a tailored suite of IT support services and customised solutions to meet specific and unique customer needs position us to greatly support the retail industry post-pandemic, without reverting to classic "break/fix" models.

About ESP Global Services Ltd.

For nearly three decades ESP Global Services has been providing IT support solutions to companies worldwide, be it day-to-day on-site support, service desk coordination, or system installation and integration for a range of industries. This has given us the ability, agility and mobility to place engineers where you need them, when you need them.

Contact: marketing@esp.co.uk