



River Island Creates Store Of The Future

ABOUT RIVER ISLAND

River Island has been in the retail business for over 60 years and is one of the best-loved brands on the high street. It's renowned for its stylish and affordable fashion with great design at the heart of all it creates: most of its lines are designed in-house by a team that delivers new fashions in-store and online every week. It runs over 320 stores in 12 countries. It's working on a number of exciting digital projects as it leads the retail industry's drive to use new technology to build more compelling and rewarding experiences for customers.

Challenge

River Island is building an agile infrastructure. The goal is to ensure the business can take the lead in the use of digital technology to provide an engaging customer experience across in-store, online and mobile channels. The in-store element of the project will see the company provide staff with technology to better answer customer queries, efficiently manage key tasks (e.g. merchandising) and allow customers to interact with the environment in more interesting and rewarding ways. Furthermore, River Island will use technology to find new ways to collect data about its operations to further refine the customer experience.

To create the digital store environment, it identified the need to provide staff with more versatile mobile technology.

SUMMARY

RIVER ISLAND

Customer

River Island, UK

M-NETICS

a Peplink-Ryzex Company

Partner

M-Netics

Industry

Retail

Challenge

Provide in-store technology across 280 outlets to create a fresh and contemporary retail space to help staff deliver a great customer experience

Solution

- MC40 touch handheld computer
- ET1 enterprise tablet
- EWB100 enterprise wireless communicator

Results

- Enhanced customer service
- Improved brand perceptions
- More efficient store operations
- Predictable cost of ownership with full service and support



Solution

River Island trialled technology at a number of pilot stores including flagship outlets in London's Marble Arch and Liverpool. Mobile technology specialist M-Netics has been a long-term partner of River Island and led the pilot deployment in Marble Arch. M-Netics' solution was ultimately successful, based on the mix of technology that it recommended and its range of professional services, which include mobile device deployment, commissioning, and service and maintenance.

"We've a strong relationship with M-Netics," says Doug Gardner. "They act quickly and responsively: as we're looking to deploy an agile infrastructure across our business, we need our partners to be similarly dynamic and energetic – we get that from M-Netics."

River Island's in-store staff will now use mobile computers to connect to apps and the back office over Wi-Fi. Its staff are young and it wanted to provide them with intuitive and stylish devices based on a touch-screen OS that they're familiar with and that would look good to customers.

After a review of options, the MC40 touch computer was selected as the main device to be used by teams. Based on Android, it offers the pinch, zoom and touch operation

that people are used to and has a dedicated scanner for more efficient inventory management. In addition, River Island is providing EWBs – smart discreet lapel badges – which connect wirelessly to the MC40s to allow staff to instantly chat to one another using Push-to-Talk. Six channels are available in each store from click and collect to ladies' wear, men's wear and more. ET1 enterprise tablet computers running on Android Jelly Bean are also being supplied to staff in-store. The ET1 was chosen due to its long battery life (it lasts over typical shifts), rugged design, 360° rotating screen and convenient carry strap on the back of the device that makes it easier to carry and use.

In total, 15 apps will be available. These include M-Netics' IM2-Meteor application for stock management and handling product enquiries, along with email, store task lists and access to the corporate intranet.

To support the technology M-Netics is providing a complete range of professional services, such as the commissioning and deployment of mobile devices with the right apps and images across all stores. Also, for five years, under a FastTrack Zebra service contract, M-Netics will manage the mobile devices, updating software, replacing faulty items next-day and providing help-desk support.

“We’re a pioneer in one of the most exciting areas of retailing: the intersection of fast fashion with technology. Our large-scale digital transformation project is creating an agile infrastructure that allows us to quickly take advantage of new technology. Our stores are a point of difference for us and will play a key role in this. We’re creating a digital store experience that provides compelling reasons for people to engage with our brand. For example, a customer can use Wi-Fi to inform staff that they’re in-store so they bring forward a click and collect package. Giving customers reasons to connect with us in-store in turn allows us to use new apps such as dwell time analysis to further improve the customer service.”

Doug Gardner, CIO, River Island

Results

The main benefit for River Island is improved customer service. Says Doug Gardner: “People were coming into our stores with more product knowledge than our staff. That’s no longer the case as our teams can find everything they need on the MC40s or ET1. And with access to such a wide array of apps from stock checking to email and accessing our intranet, we’re much more visible on the floor.”

What’s more, any concerns that River Island had about training its teams to use the devices dissipated when staff in its flagship Liverpool store picked up some trial units and started to use them immediately. “It showed that our staff are part of the technology generation and would have no problems using their devices with little or no training. We looked at other options, such as smartphones, but I like the MC40 because it looks like a consumer device and works like one, while being tough and durable to cope with the rough and tumble of our busy stores. We also have clear systems and processes in place to control the roll-out of new software so there are no surprises – it’s a great balance of form, function and commercial factors,” comments Doug Gardner.

The devices are supporting a more efficient store environment. For instance using their handheld devices and the IM2-Meteor app, staff

will be able to more easily scan in deliveries and complete day-to-day inventory tasks, while managers can view weekly PoS and merchandising updates on-screen on the ET1s without printing reams of paper. Also, the Android OS means that River Island can easily develop and add new apps.

The availability of the mobile devices is business critical. With this in mind, the FastTrack support from M-Netics and Zebra will provide the peace of mind of fixed costs for the business, with next-day swap out for devices to ensure that any technology issues don’t interrupt operations.

Looking forward, River Island will use its agile infrastructure to quickly develop and trial new digital services and roll out those that are popular. The approach will be similar to the accelerated development taken by user experience teams that refine customer journeys on websites.

“We’re creating an agile environment so we can quickly roll out digital technology,” concludes Doug Gardner. “The winners in retail will be those who connect seamlessly, and in rewarding ways, with customers across mobile, online and in-store channels. We have the capability now to lead in the adoption of new technology to enhance the experience across these channels and we have some exciting projects under way – the future’s bright for our business.”

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