

To deliver the excellent customer experiences that create lifetime loyalty, future-ready retailers must deploy frontline employee experience platforms that empower employees to provide more value through access to communication and collaboration tools, community, learning resources, and operational guidance.

# The Definitive Buyer's Guide for Frontline Employee Experience Platforms

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## Introduction

The frontline employee experience platform is the next-generation digital workplace. The frontline worker has a different set of expectations today. In an economic environment where labor is in short supply and turnover is higher than ever, retailers need to be attentive to workforce needs. Frontline employees want to feel part of a community at work, to feel empowered regarding schedules and work assignments, and to communicate with each other and their employer.

The good news is that workforce experience has finally caught up to the human experience outside of work. Workforce management tools are often deployed to frontline workers' mobile devices. Using intuitive interfaces, these tools empower employees to work more productively and to provide better customer service through access to the community and learning/knowledge resources, easier communication, and operational guidance.

Many conversations with retailers today pivot on the shifts in the frontline workforce that necessitate investment in technology that empowers store associates by putting information and access into their hands. It makes sense that retailers want to invest in the frontline workforce, because retailers have demonstrated that when you do, sales growth rates are above average.

Frontline employee experience platforms are first and foremost employee experience communication, collaboration, learning, and task management platforms that give employees access to the information they need to be successful and purposeful. In addition to driving operational excellence, these tools allow associates to spend more time with customers, creating meaningful, impactful experiences in the store, which drive improved customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction. Vendors in the workforce experience space differentiate themselves by delivering expert and easy-to-use guidance on what to do and when to do work.

## AT A GLANCE

### KEY STATS

- » 38% of retailers report that they are mitigating workforce skills gaps by investing in communication and collaboration applications (source: IDC's *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 6, July 2022*).
- » 54% of retailers report that they have already selected an employee experience platform (source: IDC's *Global Retail Operating Models Survey, August 2022*).

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » The frontline employee experience platform is the next-generation digital workplace.
- » When retailers invest in the frontline workforce, sales growth rates are above average.

To accomplish this, providers combine intuitive interface design, seamless process design, and integrated business workflows. Employees want to interact with intuitive displays that look and behave the same way a smartphone does, and they do not want new work — but instead tools that make existing work easier to do. With retail's ongoing labor shortage rates, a retailer's investment in intuitive, easy-to-use assistive technology for its workforce will be a talent attraction and retention strategy for the Gen Z workforce.

## **Why Frontline Employee Experience (for Deskless Workers) Matters and Why Now?**

The following are key reasons why retailers must put frontline employee experience at the center of their business strategy:

- » Working in retail is a shared experience among many Americans and often the first introduction to the workplace. In fact, 6 in 10 Americans have worked a retail job and nearly a third (32%) of all first jobs are in retail (source: **NRF.com**).
- » Frontline employee experience is fixed to customer experience. Improving the productivity and satisfaction of the workforce is the fastest path to growing customer loyalty and satisfaction. Making the in-store and field employee experience better by creating engaged, happy employees raises performance, makes employees stay longer, and is a great strategy to achieve operational excellence.
- » Today's frontline workforce is the social generation, which builds community by connecting digitally. The sense of belonging that stems from being part of a community at work provides the backdrop that shapes the passions, loyalties, and career paths of retail employees.
- » Finding purpose and meaning in work reduces the indifference that can lead to employees who feel entitled to steal or commit fraud — a problem that plagues retailers. Focus on the people behind the work to achieve excellence.
- » It's good for growing the business. The last mile of customer experience is store experience. When retailers invest in frontline employees, they can grow sales above average. Communications technology can give employees access to the community and information they need to feel successful and purposeful. Customers are more knowledgeable than ever; they do their research online, and when they come to the store, they want store associates that can advise them.

## **Changing Buyer Considerations and Requirements**

Today's retail technology buyer has access to a wide array of choices in most technology areas. Retailers tell us time and time again that the key considerations when selecting a partner are the application's fit to purpose, the partner's expertise in the industry segment, and the vendor's ability to meet the value — innovation — adaptability metrics that they have established for each technology. Most retailers interested in buying employee experience platforms tell us the following:

- » They can do more with less — that is, they can add new applications while simplifying the collection of systems in use today that has become far too complex because of many years of technology investments that are not human centric and intuitive, not well integrated, and not built on modern technology platforms.

- » But they won't compromise on satisfying customer needs. The competition for consumer mindshare and share of wallet has never been fiercer. To win, retailers need to meet customers where they are, providing the adaptability and service the customer craves.
- » They want to break the cycle of siloed investments and invest in digital platforms that connect the dots between people and departments and reduce complexity. Bridge the gaps — don't create new ones when investing in new capabilities. Omni-channel strategy needs to start with solid frontline worker strategies: Communications, learning, and task management need to fit together, and corporate headquarters need to be able to correlate the data in real time.
- » They will bridge gaps between the headquarters and frontline workers. By creating visibility and measurement tools, they will help the workforce make better business decisions that will improve outcomes.
- » A unified digital experience is the goal. When buying employee experience platforms, the frontline workforce's experience needs to be central to the purchasing decision. Seek to build a community — to engage workers and create better customer experiences — to ensure brand consistency that will instill organizational pride.

## Selection Recommendations

We know retailers are bracing for a year of inflation and recession, with anxieties over how currency volatility and geopolitical tensions may impact supply chains and cost of service. But 35.1% of retailers surveyed by IDC expect a recession in 2023 to have no impact on IT budgets and another 11.6% expect a recession would drive an increase in IT budgets (source: IDC's *Resiliency Survey*, January 2023). Retailers are succeeding by listening better to serve employees better, who in turn provide exceptional customer service. Despite the complexities of a volatile market, or perhaps because of it, retailers are seeking to make careful selections of technologies built for today's employees to help retailers ride out uncertainty and succeed far into the future.

When considering frontline employee experience platform investments, retailers should:

- » Invest in technology that will lift up the workforce, not eliminate it. Empowering and upskilling employees with platforms that provide all the capabilities that they need to thrive and to serve customers better is the investment that will keep giving.
- » Choose technology vendors that build intuitive interfaces and capabilities that increase employee engagement and attract the next-gen workforce. The modern user experience (UX) needs to be easy/intuitive for hourly workers to pick up and use, without much training to drive expected adoption.
- » Showcase tools built for frontline employee experience — that is, all-in-one apps used in the flow of work — not just legacy workforce management. Frontline employee experience tools differentiate by focusing on mindful communication, learning, and collaboration to drive operational excellence.
- » Investigate technology partners that can help you scale and adapt capabilities for today and into the future that are fit to purpose. Choose a solution with capabilities to orchestrate and automate your business workflows to get the job done.

- » Identify vendors that are leveraging AI and automation to make the workforce smarter, more informed, and more productive. Frontline experience platforms should help employees get the job done and drive productivity and improved business performance.
- » Offer solutions that provide insights into corporate and store management. Expect intuitive advanced analytics that utilize real-time data.
- » Link corporate and distributed people and assets together in a best-in-class system/ecosystem that works together. Integrations to point of sale (POS), human capital management (HCM), labor management and scheduling (LMS), customer relationship management (CRM), and analytics solutions should be seamless and may utilize APIs, SSO/JIT SSO, iFrames, and deep linking.

### Worksheet Section

TABLE 1: **Vetting Initial Vendor Fit**

<i>Does the vendor have expertise in our industry and in frontline employee experience management?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Do the use cases/case studies presented by the vendor match our organization's desired outcomes and build trust?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Can the vendor demonstrate customer success with companies like mine?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Will the vendor and its partners provide the level of technical and customer support necessary for our organization, including support for all the geographic regions where we operate?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Is the vendor knowledgeable about applicable regulations and laws that affect our company?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Does the vendor have experience in successfully implementing frontline employee experience platforms in our industry and for companies of similar size using a consultative approach?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Does the solution reduce or add complexity (add one more tool or provide a more unified digital experience consolidating existing tools)?</i>	Yes/No

Source: IDC, 2023

TABLE 2: **Key Required Capabilities/Critical Application Capabilities**

<i>Is the application providing an integrated and intuitive platform that provides all the capabilities including communication, training, and task management that our frontline workforce needs?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Is the user interface intuitive to use with minimal training? Is it easily accessible and easy to use for frontline teams?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Is it engaging, fun, and social?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Does it provide a personalized employee experience (targeted based on locations, roles, and behaviors) to cut through the noise and complexity of navigating retail employee responsibilities?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Is it an integrated platform for communication and collaboration? Does it apply a holistic approach to its design to connect the frontline with the corporate headquarters?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Does it fit the needs of and enable all the roles (associates, store/area managers, admins, etc.)?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Is it easy to create content and workflows on the platform? (Note: the frequency of newly created content drives adoption.)</i>	Yes/No
<i>Do global organizations have the ability to support multilingual and translation plug-ins to cover all regions and employee languages?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Can we brand the solution to provide our own company experience?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Does it give us real-time insights and is it measurable (e.g., data analytics, reporting/dashboard)? Does it provide actionable data to make business decisions?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Can the vendor integrate with our organization's other IT systems (e.g., human resource systems, knowledge management, workforce scheduling and management, communications, email)?</i>	Yes/No

Source: IDC, 2023

TABLE 3: **Long-Term Vendor Compatibility**

<i>Is the pricing competitive and offered with variable terms or periods?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Has the vendor shared its frontline employee experience product road map, and does it meet our expectations for progress?</i> <i>- Will the solution scale with our organizational needs now and into the future?</i> <i>- Is the solution agile and easy to adapt to future innovation needs?</i> <i>- Does it have customizable templates and capabilities to grow with our business practices?</i> <i>- Is the vendor investing in the platform and in new features and forward looking leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as AI?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Does the vendor apply a consultative approach to establish strategic plans and change management?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Has the vendor demonstrated multiple customer engagement touch points, such as user groups, feedback surveys, and training?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Do we feel confident that the vendor's customer success program will help our business grow in the long term?</i>	Yes/No
<i>Does the vendor have sufficient investment funding or profitability to ensure it will be an effective long-term partner?</i>	Yes/No

Source: IDC, 2023

## About the Analyst



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As Group Vice President, Leslie Hand is responsible for the research direction and teams supporting IDC Retail Insights and IDC Financial Insights. Ms. Hand works closely with the teams to help guide technology suppliers and buyers to develop best practices and strategies, aligned with where they are and where they want to go, leveraging IDC quantitative and qualitative data sets.

## MESSAGE FROM THE SPONSOR

**About YOOBIC**

YOOBIC is an all-in-one frontline employee experience platform. Our mobile app gives business leaders and frontline teams the performance tools they need to communicate, learn, and work—all in one place. With streamlined communications, mobile learning, and digitized task management, YOOBIC drives operational excellence while drastically improving the frontline employee working experience. 350+ companies around the world including Aeropostale, Boots, GameStop, Lancôme, Lacoste, Lidl, Peloton, Puma, and Vans trust YOOBIC to improve operational consistency and agility, get real-time visibility into multi-location business execution, and improve customer experience. To learn more about YOOBIC, visit [www.yoobic.com](http://www.yoobic.com) or follow us on LinkedIn.

[The Complete Guide to Frontline Employee Experience Platforms](#)



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