



ThinkTimeTM

TALKING SHOP: TRANSFORMING TASK MANAGEMENT WITH THINKTIME

MOVING RETAIL OPERATIONS FORWARD WITH A MODERN
TASK, COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT PLATFORM

"60% of corporate systems require too much manual work . . ."

"Only 20% of companies use solutions to automate compliance . . ."

- SAP SuccessFactors Webinar (December 8, 2016)

In this guide we explore how the targeted distribution of communication optimizes retail store operations management and support, and transforms into a highly efficient workflow that ensures store-to-store consistency while saving time and money.

Tim Berners-Lee writing the first web browser in 1990; Jeff Bezos launching Amazon.com in 1995; the launch of online PC sales at Dell.com in 1996... These are some of the milestones that illustrate e-commerce wasn't born in a single act of creation. It evolved in steps to become the irresistible force we see today.

Over the years, the disruptive nature of e-commerce has proved to be transformative for many retail store businesses. This agent for change has led larger retailers to embrace the omnichannel (or 'multichannel') business model, seeking to integrate and join up the dots between online, instore and everything around the edge and in between.

However, despite embracing technology in some areas, it seems that many retailers are still failing to fully leverage the gifts of tech for maximum effect. There are yet untapped efficiencies to be exploited in retail management.

One of these is in the flow of communication between operations support functions and the stores. Emails, spreadsheets and telephone calls frequently weave together into a chaotic process that means it's problematical to ensure accurate execution and consistency from store to store.

Distributing information about task assignment, scheduling tasks and tracking progress is one strand. Managing requests for support and making sure they are dealt with in a satisfactory and timely fashion is another. These are frequently handled by labor intensive, manual processes that are quite simply inefficient.

Today, it's hard to imagine a retail chain managing operations without tech. Many have used technology tools for many, many years. Over the last decade, some were likely ahead of the curve and adopted first generation operations management tools. Now, such tools and their later successors are a legacy. They may provide functionality, but they are far from optimized. Essentially, technology moves fast, and whether we like it or not, it drags us along for the ride. Continual development means older digital tools are now past their sell by date.

The way things get done around here today

Managing seasonality is something of a shared experience that the majority of retailers identify with. This might be the true seasonal changes of spring - summer - fall - winter, or annually recurring single day events, such as public holidays or seasonal periods, such as Christmas.

Mixed in with this, routine day-to-day changes such as promotions, markdowns and clearance are things that all retail stores need to manage on a regular basis.

Many that are involved in such processes should recognize or identify with this scenario:



Merchandising has had this in the pipeline for a year and a half. For Operations it's been six months in the planning. Summer is fast coming up. Commencing next week, Operations is initiating the activity to transition the stores to the new seasonal lines.

The 'playbook' of instructions and spreadsheets is emailed out to everybody. There's no filtering, store managers and associates all receive the same information. It's not ideal, but it's just the way things have always been done around here...

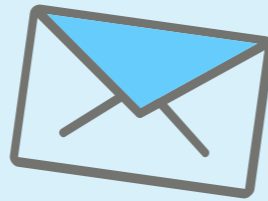


Unfiltered Distribution Creates Confusion



With no information filtering, each manager and Associate has some figuring out to do. What to delegate to who, and for which parts to personally undertake responsibility. Inevitably, with no filtering, there is some duplication...

Can't they get it right sometimes?



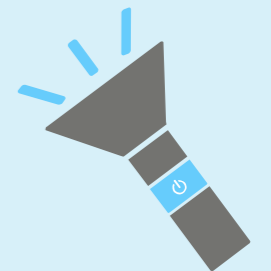
Experienced (AKA 'long suffering') associates get that Groundhog Day feeling... it's the same as it ever was... just like it was Xn times before...! Enthusiasm is a precious commodity. Where there is a vacuum of passion for the job, emails may go unread and things are simply not properly synced.

Welcome to Spreadsheet Hell



Reams of printed spreadsheets are essential for managing just about everything, but are easy to lose or mislay. When they go missing, it is no surprise that there are inconsistencies from store-to-store because spreadsheets are pivotal to so much of these parts of the operations process.

Are they really this out of touch?



Not all associates are long suffering and some are truly engaged. (They'll learn, soon enough...). Those that are switched on, wired in and still enthused, identify what they need to be doing and plough on. But there's gaps and discontinuity because others have suffered from apathy.

How do I get help?



Associates have questions about the playbook and often request help for other unforeseen problems. Emails are sent and phone calls are made to HQ. Will they or won't they respond? Support requests may go unanswered, frustrating associates and store managers.

Who's supposed to do what? When?



There are a lot of moving parts to join up. Hiring, and training and updating on policies and certification... Resetting departments, window dressing storefronts and rolling out signing packages. It's clear everybody is not on quite the same page if you're setting up to move snow boots when you should be shifting bikinis!

Meanwhile... back at HQ...

Associates have questions about the playbook and often request help for other unforeseen problems. Emails are sent and phone calls are made to HQ. Will they or won't they respond? Support requests may go unanswered, frustrating associates and store managers.

Where's the actionable intelligence?



Without an integrated and properly structured system it is extremely difficult to assess how well things are going on the ground because there's no easy way to monitor progress. More than that, the data and analytics that provides the business intelligence about how to improve things is hard to get at.

Meantime, back at the stores...

Stores might fail to hit performance targets. Morale across stores dips and store managers get asked some difficult questions...

A chaotic task management and support process is grossly inefficient.

From the perspective of operations executives, field leadership, store managers and associates, the approach outlined above is highly unsatisfactory and for all it is likely to be a source of frustration.

So, what's the point?

OK, this may seem slightly contrived; however, much of it is likely to sound familiar. The point is you get the picture:



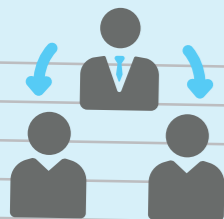
For head office executives

Operations SVPs and managers lack visibility of what's happening on the ground and how well things are progressing. Business intelligence to provide strategic insight is patchy, to say the least.



For store managers

For store managers there might be question marks over performance. There may be doubts about management capability, professional competence and, ultimately, suitability for the role.



For field leaders

For field leaders it's déjà vu all over again . . . caught in between the office and the stores with one of the hardest jobs around, living without the best tools to manage the chaos possible makes the challenge even greater.



For associates

From the point of view of associates, it's something of a recurring disappointment. Every time, management promises it will be better the next time around, but it isn't. It's like a string of broken promises.

So, what is the alternative to the way we operate today?

...imagine you decide to eliminate this manual approach to operations task management.

How could you do it more effectively and efficiently?

Basically, if you had a blank sheet of paper on which to re-design the process, what would it look like?

Well, it could look like this:



A smarter approach

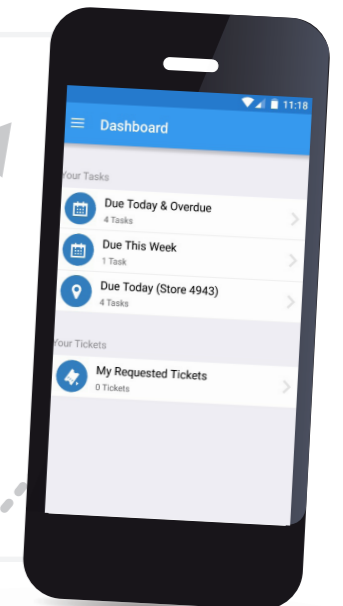
Consider the advantages of a cloud-based task management and support platform for a retailer that uses labor intensive, manual processes or even a legacy application that is now behind the curve.

This would be specifically designed and tailored to the needs of large scale retail operations management. Such a solution provides everyone that needs to be in the loop with a customized experience and provides the right information to enable them to execute their roles more effectively.



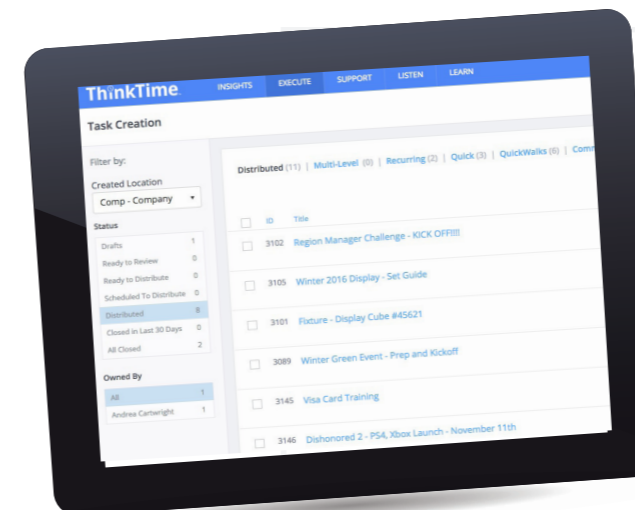
Logon with mobile devices

What if associates, store managers and the HQ operations team could logon to the system using the organization's preferred internet connected devices, web or mobile? This provides fingertip access on the move with tablets and smartphones. The solution organizes task management through its Execute functionality, enabling everyone to see their schedule of assigned tasks and collaborative activities on a calendar... And complete them, on the fly!



Task assignment

Imagine prepping and scheduling tasks to be distributed on Kick Off days, filtered and targeted to ensure each individual sees what they need to know... Whether it is configuring store displays, rolling out signing packs, updating on training and company policy, or any of the other myriad of tasks that need to be carried out to support effective and efficient store operations, information is prepared in advance and flows to the right people at the right time.



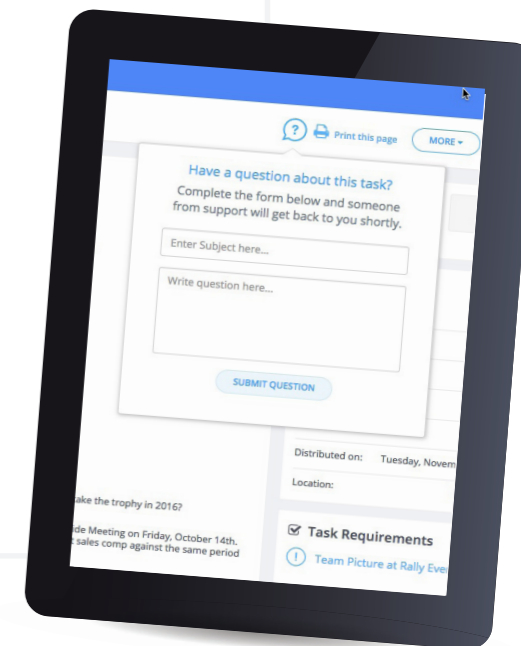
Load balancing backend and front of store...

What if operations executives at head office could be empowered to exercise a gatekeeper approach? This would let them monitor and control tasking so associate workload is balanced between executing backend operations and supporting front of store, customer facing activity.



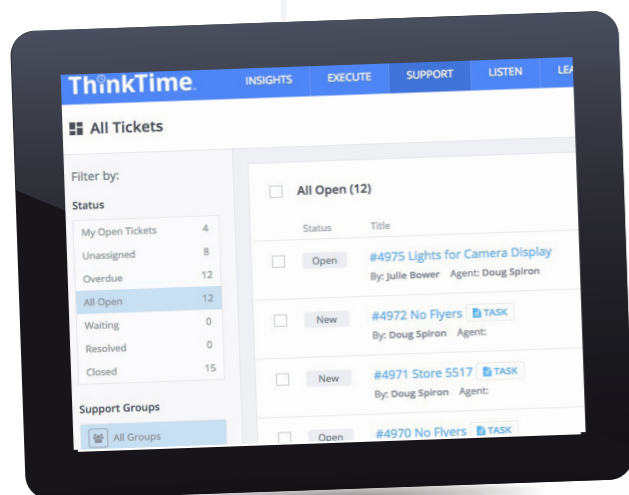
Help and visuals at the fingertips...

Within each task, a help function enables questions or concerns to be sent direct to the HQ support groups and routed to the nominated support group members for any given task. Amongst other things, drilling down into each task provides display visualization and lets people submit photographic evidence and indicate task completion.



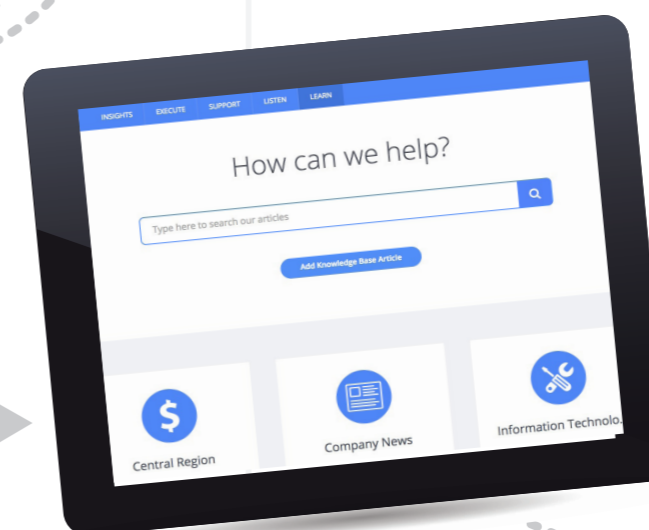
Problem solving

Supposing requests for support from stores could be filtered to the appropriate support group enabling collaborative working to resolve the issue at hand in a timely way? Members of operations support groups would get visibility of the groups and the tickets to which they are assigned. Operations executives would be able to view KPIs and monitor overall support performance.



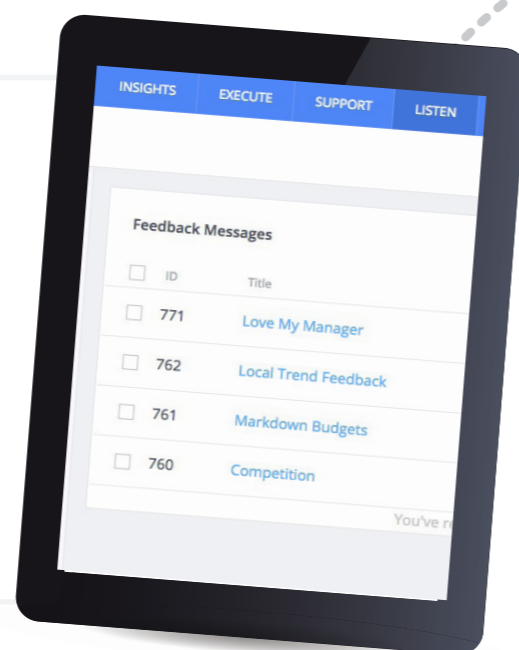
Learn with Knowledge Base

Wait! What about a Learn function with a completely customizable Knowledge Base that lets you design and structure information your way? Organize information in any way you want and provide a centralized library. Reference information like Standard Operating Procedures, Policies and Job Specifications; articles and links to external sources for tips and advice put self-help at everyone's fingertips.



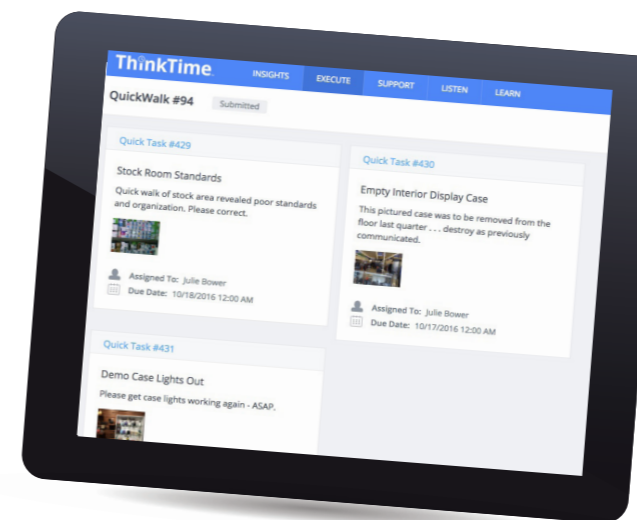
Listen to feedback...

What if there was a Listen function that enables anonymous feedback from those on the grounds to be fed into the system? Such intel is often invaluable, but lost. A system which supports anonymous feedback would provide the 'back channel' to make sure important information and input is passed on, whatever the reasons people providing it may have for not wishing to be identified.



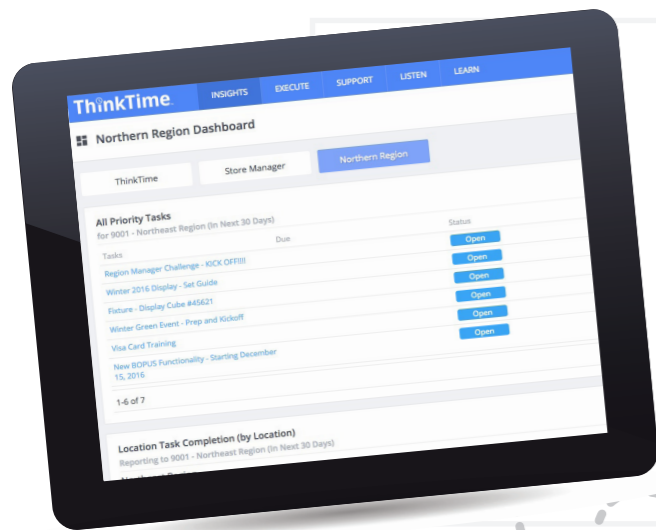
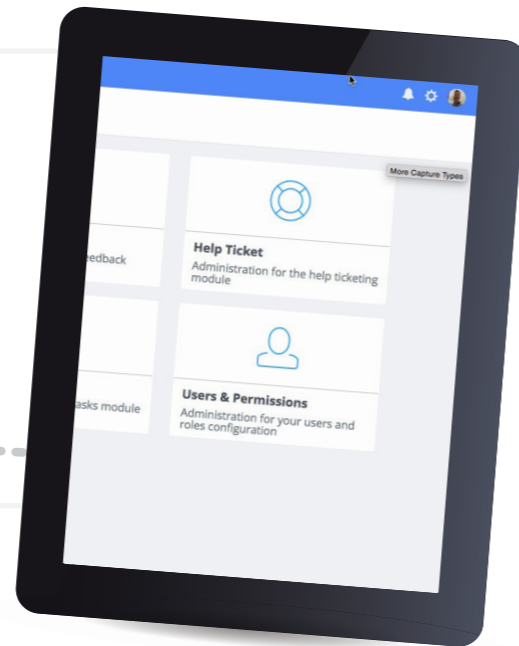
Get into action!

You have standards for the way you want things to run and you need the entire field organization united on them. Aligning everyone on those standards through "QuickWalks" and "Store Visit" tools will ensure you are measuring what matters most – consistency from store to store across your chain.



Customize that!

What value could be attached to an administration panel which lets you configure the different functional modules? From defining and managing users in groups and by store locations, to configuring global dashboards, to designing surveys to actively gather information from any group, you get the fine control to make sure the solution works for your retail chain.

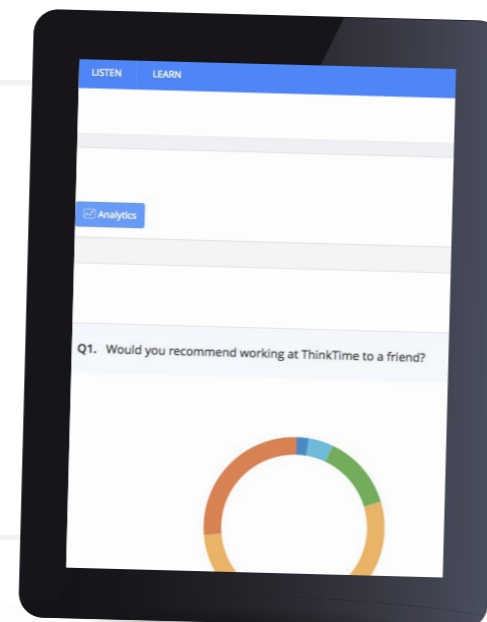


Situation at-a-glance

How about tailoring the home screen for everybody? Imagine including a dashboard that collapses headline data like real time KPIs, alerts to tasks that are overdue or up-and-coming, and provides links to seasonal Knowledge Base content, all onto a single screen. Just right for preventing apathy and keeping instore teams engaged, motivated and focused on what's important.

Strategic thinking

What about developing the ability to think strategically with Insights functionality? Providing executives and managers with access to data, reports and analytics would make it easy to obtain actionable intelligence to help executive operations develop its strategic thinking...



Think about the impact such a system could have on your results!

OK, so we jazzed it up a little?

This is today's reality of how a well thought out solution designed and built specifically to defeat the inefficiency of legacy tech and manual processes transforms retail operations management.

This is the consistent and repeatable efficiency which you are able to apply to instore task management and support request handling when you adopt a targeted distribution communication solution. The ROI for this type of improvement to the way many retailers do things today is significant and immediate.

We call it **ThinkTime**

ThinkTime lets retail chains centralize operational task management and support, transforming efficiency by enabling operations to provide the right information, to the right individuals, in the right stores, at the right time. It is the ultimate task and communication platform for retailers on the market today.

Make beautiful music in retail operations. Orchestrate it with ThinkTime.

[*Click here to find out more*](#)



About ThinkTime

After more than 30 years working in and around retail, we know the vital role tasking plays in the retail workplace.

It's a fine line completing the day in day out stuff that needs to get done while simultaneously delivering excellent customer service. It is critical to communicate effectively, provide the tools necessary and measure and track the completion of tasks. It is even more important, however, is getting associates back focused on the customer, selling and delivering brand elevating customer service - fast!

That's the difference ThinkTime makes inside our clients workplaces everyday. When employees feel strong direction and support they are more engaged in delivering personalized service to their customers. And that means a strong return on investment for your tasking hours everyday.

What's different about our product is it's simplicity - ThinkTime is intuitive. Retail executives and analysts alike are calling ThinkTime a "disruptor in the space" because we make it easy for retailers to provide clear instructions, monitor work and track the quality of each project.

When you see improved response times for each task and help ticket along with more consistent compliance, you get the result you demand from your business. ThinkTime is the answer.



References and further reading

E-commerce - Wikipedia page

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-commerce#Timeline>

www.ThinkTime.com

info@thinktime.com

877.844.4462

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