

Retailers' current reflecting and learning from challenges

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Abstract

The new coronavirus impact on businesses (and not only) forced the reviewing of the supply chains' processes, considering autonomous warehouse solutions, inventory management techniques, autonomous inventory delivery, and robots' use in retail. We are witnessing a quick evolution of BOPIS and BORIS, of the automated merchandising, of the "meals on wheels", and even going beyond the standard vending machine offering, while considering practical considerations of an unstaffed operation, including the security concerns. Important scenarios to support future planning were launched, and there is no doubt about the need for a coherent consumer-centric business system within the enormous shift of the consumer behavior, learning from the best practices such as those promoted in time by ECR Community and The Consumer Goods Forum, adapted to the current context. It is now the time to also recognize essential workers, and to forge a retailers' healthy work culture so as to adequately servicing customers. And while advancing from one crisis to another but unprecedented, being now on the road of recovery, reflecting and learning from challenges, it is important to look into the future with confidence, solidarity and empathy.

Keywords: COVID-19; Supply Chains; BOPIS; BORIS; ECR; CGF

JEL Classification: L81, L86, M31, Q55

Reviewing the supply chains' processes, autonomous warehouse solutions, inventory management techniques, autonomous inventory delivery, and robots' use in retail

In order to determine areas where technology can help improve – underlined Vend's Retail Expert and Content Strategist – retailers are reviewing their supply chains' processes, their staff being well informed and trained accordingly (valorizing change management, talent, technology, internal collaboration, and external collaboration), reviewing consistently their inventory levels, taking advantage of technology (including as a way to correct delays), controlling the flow of goods and services, and maximizing the value to their customers. (Nicasio, 2019) Very recently, the same Retail Expert and Content Strategist argued that retail space planning, for instance, has meet new challenges within their adaptation to the new shoppers' behaviors determined by COVID-19 (which altered the way of browsing and buying), mapping out a layout and design a retail experience accordingly, by considering: both the necessary store's foot traffic data and number of employees during each shift; the top products' categories; the customers' buying journey; social distancing, hygiene areas, and health/safety equipment; maximizing space with the help of vertical shelves; improving the checkout process accordingly (clear signage, spacing out cashiers, Plexiglas, self-checkout, efficient checkout experience); the improvement of the fulfillment of online orders (BOPIS, order online, pick up in-store; curbside pickup, buying online and driving then to retailers' location to pick it up without leaving the car); making the outside of their stores look cleaner, neater, or more attractive etc. (Nicasio, 2020) And of course, without forgetting to have an adequate visual merchandising strategy including innovative ways to keep retailers' customers interested in coming always back to browse their physical store. (Nicasio, 2020)

In May this year, the Senior Vice President of Products at Appriss Retail (a leader in data and analytics solutions for retail organizations, which is known including for transferring its expertise from analyzing register transactions to those affecting store stock) showed that the retail landscape is further transformed by the so-called BOPIS (buy online, pickup in store) and BORIS (buy online, return in store), both of them making effective inventory management becoming a growing priority. And this considering: the goal of ensuring that products are in the right place, at the right time, being sold at the best price possible; that having the right inventory balance within the store is considered to be the primary challenge faced by retailers. (Seivold, 2020)

Recently, a Supply Chain Analyst from IGD (The Institute of Grocery Distribution, UK) showed that especially since ecommerce was booming due to the COVID-19 pandemic there is a rising demand for distribution space, operators being very interested in various types of autonomous warehouse solutions (starting with the Warehouse Management System) necessary to drive further efficiencies: autonomous (driverless) forklifts; autonomous inventory drones; autonomous mobile robots (AMRs: Goods-to-Person Robots, Autonomous Picking Carts, Autonomous Inventory Robots, Conveyance Robots). (Attar, 2020) He underlined the significant

improvements in sensors, AI and mobility which both enabled the easy deployment of these machines, and the now necessary reduced human-to-human contact ensured by them.

As argued by an eCommerce Marketing Specialist at SkuVault, Inventory management (its processes being imperative to succeed for: ecommerce, multi-channel, brick-and-mortar, Omni-channel), as a significant step in the supply chain where inventory and stock quantities are tracked in and out of retailers' warehouse, proper warehouse management being considered key), involves implementing proper inventory management techniques, such as: *economic order quantity* (EOQ, a formula involving a set of variables like total costs of production, demand rate etc. to minimize buying by identifying the greatest number of product units to order); *minimum order quantity* (MOQ, as the smallest amount of set stock a supplier is willing to sell); *ABC analysis* (A category serving as retailers' most valuable products contributing the most to overall profit; B category being the products falling in between the most and least valuable; C category being for the small transactions vital for overall profit without mattering much individually to the company altogether); *Just-in-time inventory management* (JI, as a technique arranging raw material orders from suppliers in direct connection with production schedules, being a great way to reduce inventory costs); *safety stock inventory* (used in order to prevent stock outs caused typically by incorrect forecasting or unforeseen changes in retailers' customer demand, this extra inventory being ordered beyond expected demand); *FIFO* (First in, First out, a method which is assuming that the older inventory is sold first) and *LIFO* (Last-in, First-out, as an adequate method to keep inventory fresh, assuming that the newer inventory is typically sold first, preventing this way that the inventory is going bad); *reorder point formula* (which is based on a business's own purchase and sales cycles varying on a per-product basis, this reorder point being usually higher than a safety stock number to factor in the amount of time passing from the start of the process until its conclusion); *batch tracking* (as a quality control of the quantity or consignment of goods produced at one time, tracking the expiration of inventory or defective items back to their original batch); *consignment inventory* (the vendor or wholesaler is agreeing to give the retailers like favorite consignment store their goods without paying for the inventory upfront, but paying for them only when they sell); *perpetual inventory management* (when the store doesn't actually keep the products it sells in stock, but makes a sale from an item from a third party, without seeing or touching this item itself, and shipping it to the consumer); *Lean Manufacturing* (in order to improve efficiency by eliminating both waste and any non-value-adding activities from daily business); Six Sigma (in order to increase profit, and decrease the growth of excess inventory); *Lean Six Sigma* (by focusing more on increasing word standardization and the flow of business); *demand forecasting* (as an estimate of the goods and services expected to be purchased by customers in the future, on the basis on historical sales); *cross-docking* (a JIT shipping process being created by an incoming truck unloading materials directly into outbound trucks, being little or no storage in between deliveries); bulk shipments (by palletizing inventory to ship more at once) etc. (Walts, 2020) And as we are living in an Omni channel world, retailers need to consider all the channels they sell on (brick and mortar stores, online stores, social media channels and so on), by: (Walts, 2020)

- Implementing an adequate Omni channel strategy, paying attention to the common barriers, such as: *segmented supply chain processes* (which it imposes having a unified software solution); *lack of inventory visibility* (which it imposes taking the right measures to avoid the risk of incorrect data); *order accuracy* (which it imposes having a proper automated inventory software in place); *order tracking* (which is coming with inventory visibility, imposing having a streamlined process from the moment of the purchase order; creation until its shipping out, and potentially until its return); *high inventory storage costs* (which it imposes the accommodation for bigger storage space and cost before the creation of the Omni channel strategy); *technology* (an inventory or warehouse management system being considered the real backbone of an Omni channel approach);
- Optimizing the Omni channel inventory management strategy (by integrating the supply chain, maintaining true visibility, improving the return policies, encouraging in-store returns, stocking the inventory across locations, and creating a customer satisfaction contingency plan).

It was interesting to note in February this year that the Founder of Vend, Vaughan Fergusson, an entrepreneur and technologist, pledge for retailers' need of finding the harmonious balance between shoppers and robots, taking into account the inevitability of the automation in large format store retail which is leading to a better shopping experience. He gave different examples of robots' use in retail (starting with the celebration of one human year of Marty's robot life patrolling Giant and Stop & Shop grocery stores across America; then Lowe's "LoweBot", an iPad on wheels, with customer service role), including the successfully already deployed technology (mostly) in the storeroom and warehouses (Amazon, which pioneered in the use of robots to fully automate fulfilment; the at least four robots – the Auto-C, Auto-S, Unloader, and Pickup Tower – deployed by Walmart, another pioneering big-box retailer; the giant automated robot arm Chloe introduced by Best Buy in collaboration with PaR Systems). (Fergusson, 2020) More recently, Brain Corp provided a new guide to learn how autonomous inventory delivery (as a new type of robotic application) can both help improve operational efficiency and increase productivity while easing the burden on employees (and this considering the laborious and time-consuming process of moving inventory and goods from the stockroom out to the store shelves). They estimate, for instance, that delivery robots increase productivity with 67%.

The automated merchandising, the “meals on wheels”, and going beyond the standard vending machine offering, while considering practical considerations of an unstaffed operation, including the security concerns. Scenarios to support future planning

In Sommer last year IGD, UK, signaled the mobile grocery store (“Zero Hunger Mobile Market”) brought by one of the world's largest food retailers, Kroger, to Louisville's neighborhoods, Kentucky, USA, underlining the over a year co-operation between Kroger and Dare to Care Food Bank, Louisville, KY, in order to create the mobile market where customers are paying through debit and credit cards or electronic benefit transfer (EBT). (IGD, 2019)

Very recently, we remarked that a writer and editor for RetailWire made reference to both the above mentioned Kroger's event, and Carts Blanche struggling to develop mobile convenience stores company by partnering with two entrepreneurs. (Stern, 2020)

Carts Blanche, LLC, the designer and manufacturer of the revolutionary mobile automated trailer "VendaCarts" (handled by a single employee; this kind of trailer can be equipped with any style vending/kiosks machines plus a mix of service units), the VendaCarts products being used in a multitude of new marketplaces. (PR Newswire, 2020) The solution offered through the remote management of trailer and vending machines such as ATM's, digital signage, TV's and microwaves was seen as redefining the automated retail industry, while operating permanently in an not accompanied environment.

And the above mentioned writer and editor for RetailWire raised the issue of safely bringing groceries to such areas in need by such remotely managed mobile-marts, the traditional RetailWire's discussion within this framework revealing interesting points of view with regard to the automated merchandising, the so-called "meals on wheels", and going beyond the standard vending machine offering, while considering practical considerations of an unstaffed operation, including the security concerns.

Coming back to IGD's approaches, it was also interesting to note recently what revealed the new IGD's "Eating In Vs Dining Out" report (in collaboration with foodservice consultant Peter Backman) with regard to *four useful hypothetical scenarios* (considering both the potential path of the new coronavirus, and the performance of the economy) for companies' acting in the UK's food retail or foodservice sectors and planning for their future:

- "*The Great Reset*" (seeing food and drink consumption largely shifting to home);
- "*Decade of Drift*" (manageable virus, but difficult economy's recovery and the severe financial impact on households and businesses);
- "*Technical Isolation*" (seeing online as the safest way to shop, re-shaping the retail as a technical response by businesses and consumers driven by the virus path);
- "*Globalisation Reversed*" (as the most severe scenario, imposing extensive rebuilding for supply chains, while deliveries and takeaway services for commercial foodservice becoming near the only option). (Knight, 2020) And as the IGD's Senior Analyst Food-To-Go (buying food from quick service food retailers in order to eat on the go) highlighted from this new report, these four scenarios can be used according to the model shown below:

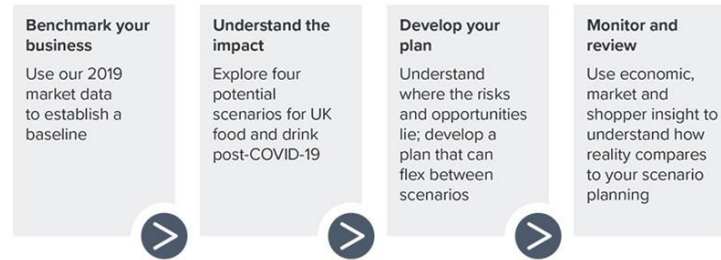


Figure no. 1: A model demonstrating how the four scenarios from the new IGD's "Eating In Vs Dining Out" report can be used by the food and drink businesses to support future planning

Source: Knight, N. (2020). What will UK food and drink look like post-COVID? Supply Chain Analysis - IGD, 24 June 2020 (work cited)

The need for a coherent consumer-centric business system within the enormous shift of the consumer behaviour

Allow us to remember that 24 years ago the Romanian Distribution Committee organized the first Efficient Consumer Response (ECR) National Symposium (in partnership with Valahia University Târgoviste, and Rescopa S.A., as reflected including next year by the "Economical True"/ "Adevarul Economic" no. 7(257)/14-20 feb.1997, the year of the second symposium of that kind). And making a bridge over time it is our duty to recall the last two significant meeting on this matter: "Wonderful Academic & Business Partnership 2017 SCM 4 ECR Conference" (<https://www.crd-aida.ro/2017/11/wonderful-academic-business-partnership-2017-scm-4-ecr-conference/>); "Continuous improvement journey of the Academic & Business Partnership 2018 SCM 4 ECR Conference" (<http://holisticmarketingmanagement.ro/continuous-improvement-journey-of-the-academic-business-partnership-2018-scm-4-ecr-conference/>).

ECR Community (previously ECR Europe), the global association for all ECR National organisations in the Retail & Consumer Product Group sector, offered us in the last years significant information with regard to:

- "ECR – Optimal shelf availability. Increasing shopper satisfaction at the moment of truth", a project involving joint efforts of a large group of European manufacturers and retailers, and overseen throughout by Roland Berger Strategy Consultants (who provided the project methodology and authored the report based on a survey assessing the following critical factors: availability along the supply chain, category characteristics, promotions, store formats, day of the week, inventory levels and distribution method); the 2016 report's results were considered as first steps on the long road to success for manufacturers and retailers needing a more closely collaboration in order to further increase consumer satisfaction and thus sales, focusing on this common goal of ensuring higher on-shelf availability at the moment of truth, reemphasizing the importance of a coherent consumer-centric business system (consisting of seven levers as shown

in the first figure below), and keeping in mind the following three maxims: sustainability, magnitude, and change (as shown in the second figure below).

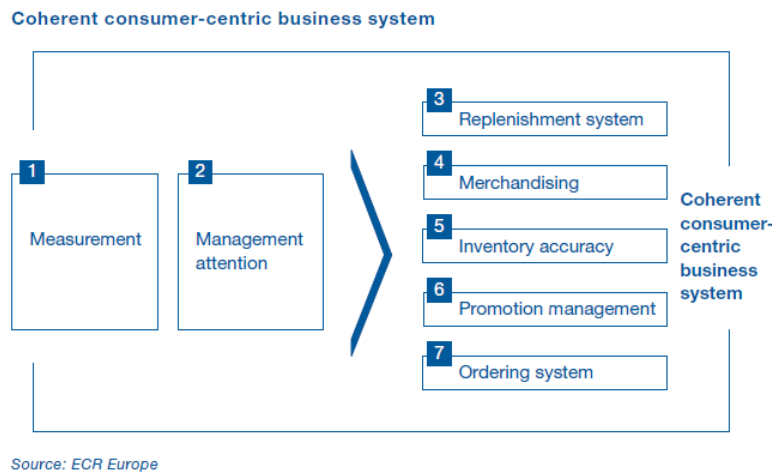


Figure no. 2: Coherent consumer-centric business system

Source: ECR – Optimal shelf availability. Increasing shopper satisfaction at the moment of truth, ECR Europe & Roland Berger Strategy Consultants, October 2016, p. 8 (work cited)

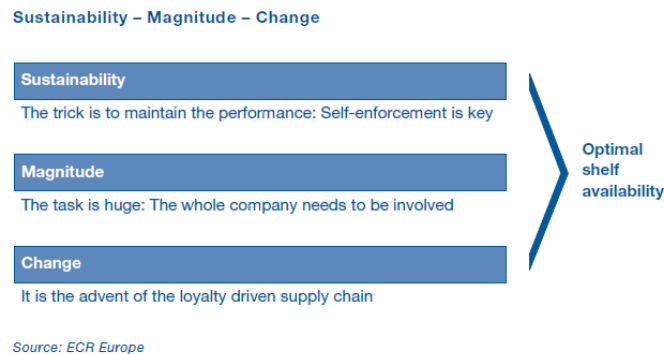


Figure no. 3: Keeping in mind the following three maxims: sustainability, magnitude

Source: ECR – Optimal shelf availability. Increasing shopper satisfaction at the moment of truth, ECR Europe & Roland Berger Strategy Consultants, October 2016, pp. 62-63 (work cited)

The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF), the truly global association in the consumer goods industry, which is embracing both retailers and manufacturers, is a CEO-led organisation helping the world's retailers and consumer goods manufacturers to collaborate (alongside other key stakeholders), in order to secure consumer trust and drive positive change, including greater efficiency. CGF is well-known for its excellent strategic organization (see the figure below), involving: 4 Pillars (End-to-End Value Chain, Health & Wellness, Sustainability, Product Safety), 7 Initiatives, 40+ Global Projects and Working Groups, 1,500 Industry Experts etc.



Figure no. 4: The Consumer Goods FORUM's Strategic Organisation

Source: CGF, <https://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com/who-we-are/overview/>

CGF also brought to us very recently useful information, such as:

- The growing sense of urgency, the growing demand for positive action, and the growing (as a result) relevance of values (among individuals, organizations, and governments) impacting outcomes, values having the power to lead the transformation, while “*the ‘value of values’ is about contributing to positive systemic change, to doing better at both micro and macro levels*”; (Gralnek, 2020)
- The enormous shift of the consumer behaviour across Europe (including how long it might endure), and this according to new research from Alvarez & Marsal and Retail Economics (they measured the attitudes of over 6,000 consumers across six European countries: UK, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Switzerland) which revealed some key trends: the cratering of the discretionary consumer spending (changes across retail categories); the deepening and accelerating of the shift to online (the European consumer being now digital-first); consumers’ expectations concerning safety (not brand experiences), trust concerning now health and safety becoming now a true retail experience. And these key trends are putting pressure on retailers to

invest in logistics and data so as to better understand and serve customers and develop new products and partnerships accordingly. (Brookes, 2020)

Recognizing essential workers, and forging a healthy work culture despite retailers' employees' heightened anxiety, so as to adequately servicing customers

On April 29, 2020, The Consumer Goods Forum reminded us – through the intermediary of Veronika Pountcheva, Global Director Corporate Responsibility and Senior Vice President, METRO AG, and Brent Wilton, Director of Global Workplace Rights, The Coca-Cola Company – that: *“During this global pandemic, essential workers are at the frontlines ensuring that society can continue. These individuals in our businesses, supply chains and communities are doing all they can to ensure we are fed and remain safe... In the coming months, The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) will be launching its Human Rights Coalition, working to end forced labour, as part of the CGF's new global strategy to accelerate collective action and help its members to drive more impactful collaborations that benefit both people and planet”*. (Pountcheva and Wilton, 2020)

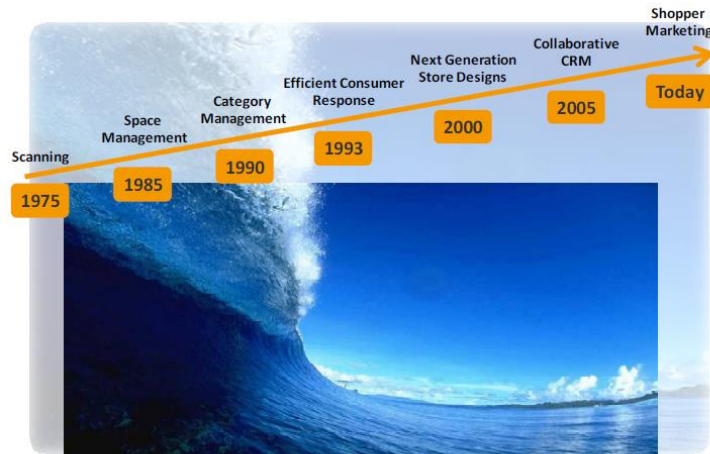
Re-gaining the competitive advantage in today's challenging climate also involves a management-by-walking-around to better understand retailers' workers (their health fears and unknowns, their way of dealing with angry customers, their struggle to successfully surmount the new store processes and policies, their concern over job security etc.), underlined recently the Director of Human Resources at Axis Communication, who outlined some useful action items such as: creating a “dashboard” indicator of retailers' workplace climate, talking freely about issues that affect retailers' workers with a help of a focus group of employees with management, implementing a cost-effective employee assistance program, practicing empathy, considering celebrations, make retailers' employees feel a part of a business with a strong set of values, thinking long-term, and taking appropriate decisive action. (Seivold, 2020)

From one crisis to another but unprecedented, learning from challenges

The new coronavirus pandemic generated a complex situation, asking for confidence, efficacy, and endurance, for practicing integrative awareness in action on the basis of a flexible perspective, adapting the operating model accordingly. (Brassey and Kruyt, 2020) There is a real need of building the organizational capability to quickly learn and act, better understanding that resilience comes through speed. (Levy et al., 2020)

Nine years ago, a valuable report of ECR Europe – entitled “Consumer & Shopper Journey Framework” – identified key changes causing the increased pressure retailers and manufacturers in creating profitable growth in their markets, the first of them being ***the consumer's perception of “value” as a result of the economic crisis*** (together with: *a new generation of consumers with different expectations on lifestyle issues such as health and sustainability; the fragmentation of media channels; the transparency of the offer due to the development of digital media and the new potential these digital media create to interact*

differently with the consumer and the shopper than in the past). (ECR Europe, 2011) It was underlined, from the very beginning, within the framework of putting shoppers/consumers at the center of the business process of both retailers (which typically think of stores/categories first) and manufacturers (which typically think about their brands first), the opportunity of integrating these two complementary perspectives (the key milestones in the retail marketing evolution are shown in the figure below). The six key steps comprised by the Consumer & Shopper Journey Framework (considered the foundation of shopper-centric marketing), and the key questions to understand it are shown in the second figure below.



Source: The Partnering Group, Inc 2010

Figure no. 5: Key Milestones in the Retail Marketing Evolution

Source: Consumer & Shopper Journey Framework, ECR Europe 2011, p. 13 (work cited)



Source: emnos and TPG

Figure no. 6: The six key steps comprised by the Consumer & Shopper Journey Framework, and the key questions to understand it

Source: Consumer & Shopper Journey Framework, ECR Europe 2011, p. 18 (work cited)

In the figure below are shown the methods to understand buying behavior (WHAT from the above figure), according to the above mentioned report:



Methods to Understand Buying Behaviour				
Research Method	Data Sources	Tools/ Methodologies	Approach	
			Basic	Advanced
Observation	Eye tracking	Analysis of orientation and search behaviour in store		x
	Virtual Shopping	Analysis of orientation, search behaviour and purchase in store, allows test of new products and commercial concepts		x
	Video Observations	Analysis of complete shopping process orientation, search behaviour, customer paths, purchase behaviour	x	
	Shopper Research Box	Analysis of orientation, at the same time tracking of changes in the shelf		x
	Customer Flow Analysis	Analysis of orientation, information and purchase behaviour in store (hidden observation or accompanied shopping)		x
Survey	Interviews	Net promoter score to measure overall customer satisfaction price expectations, price image, etc.	x	
	Focus Groups	Interactive group setting with direct and open questions on shopping experience and reasons for shopping decisions	x	
	Decision Tree Mapping	mapping of products regarding different product attributes, revealing which attributes are most important and decisive to the customer		x
	Individual Depth Interview	Direct and open questions on shopping experience and reasons for shopping decisions		x
Behavioural Measurement	Household and Consumer Panels	Identify shopping behaviour through quantitative analysis; combine survey based and behavioural insights		x
	Scanner data	Identify shopping behaviour through quantitative analysis	x	
	Loyalty or Paycard data	Customer decision trees Price sensitivity and price elasticity analysis Promotion impact analysis Shelf space elasticity analysis		x

Source: emnos and TPG

Figure no. 7: Methods to Understand Buying Behavior (WHAT)

Source: Consumer & Shopper Journey Framework, ECR Europe 2011, p. 80 (work cited)

Starting from these three pictures (allowing us to both reflect and process the experience, and gain actionable insight) from the beginning of the current decade (when the consumer's perception of "value" as a result of the economic crisis was identified as the first key change causing the increased pressure retailers and manufacturers in creating profitable growth in their markets), and coming back to the present marked by the new coronavirus crisis, when, as revealed in April this year:

- by KPMG, we were witnessing "a rapid transition towards new lifestyles and new personal values strongly guided by the new paradigm of social distancing", the psychological aspects acquiring greater importance than other profiling variables), and being necessary to address emerging on-line customer pain points; there is a powerful impact of COVID-19 on supply chain reshaping, including at the level of the "New Normal" distribution approach (as shown in the two figures below;

Supply Chain is a key lever to support the Online Sales and to grasp current opportunities

Selecting the right approach to support online sales was critical before Covid-19 to set up and break even costs.

Covid-19 outbreak has introduced the need to leverage different logistic approaches to ensure business continuity and provide supplies to customers and population overall



Figure no. 8: Supply Chain is a key lever to support the Online Sales and to grasp current opportunities

Source: COVID-19 and social distancing impact on Retail Customer Experience: KPMG vision & approach for Large Retail Chains, April 2020, p. 22 (work cited)

The "New Normal" Distribution approach - Re-Layout Toolkit

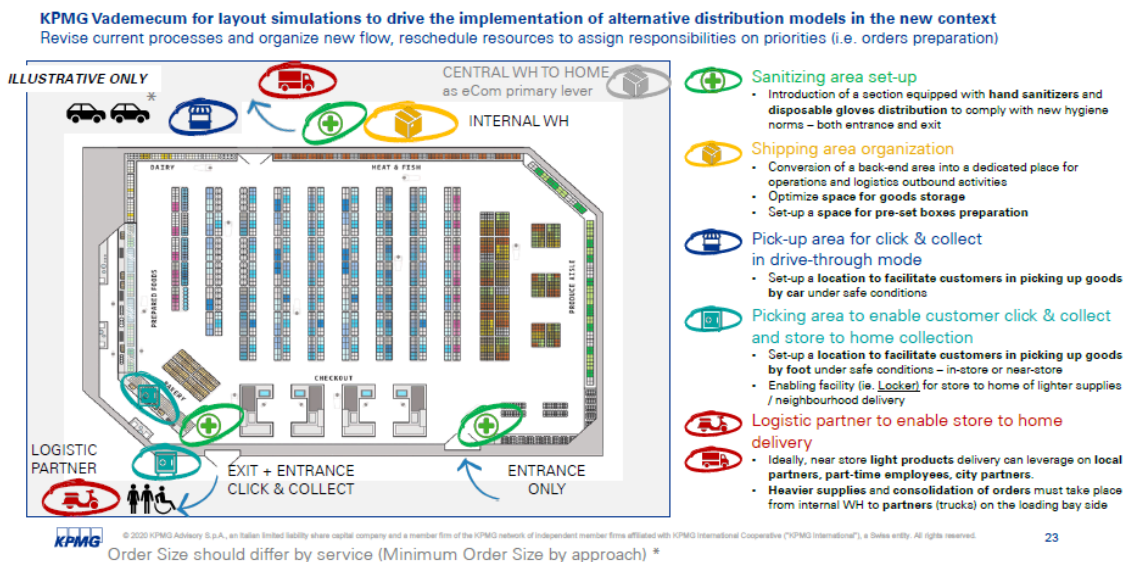


Figure no. 9: The "New Normal" Distribution approach –Re-Layout Toolkit

Source: COVID-19 and social distancing impact on Retail Customer Experience: KPMG vision & approach for Large Retail Chains, April 2020, p. 23 (work cited)

• by Strategy& Retail & Consumer Team, Part of the PwC network, we were also witnessing how the COVID 19 impact on retailers depends on the category focus and the sales footprint of retailers (as shown in the figure below), what make us to highlight the two key objectives – *Manage the crisis/Crisis task; Leverage opportunities/Management team* – for retailers identified by Strategy& Retail & Consumer Team, and possible key areas (*rebalancing supply chain and category management; boosting online presence; ensuring organizational fitness; preparing for tomorrow*) for action and exemplary levers (depending on retailer, not all identified levers being applicable to all retailers).

Overall, the COVID-19 impact depends on the category focus and the sales footprint of retailers

Sales impact from COVID-19 – Sales footprint and category focus

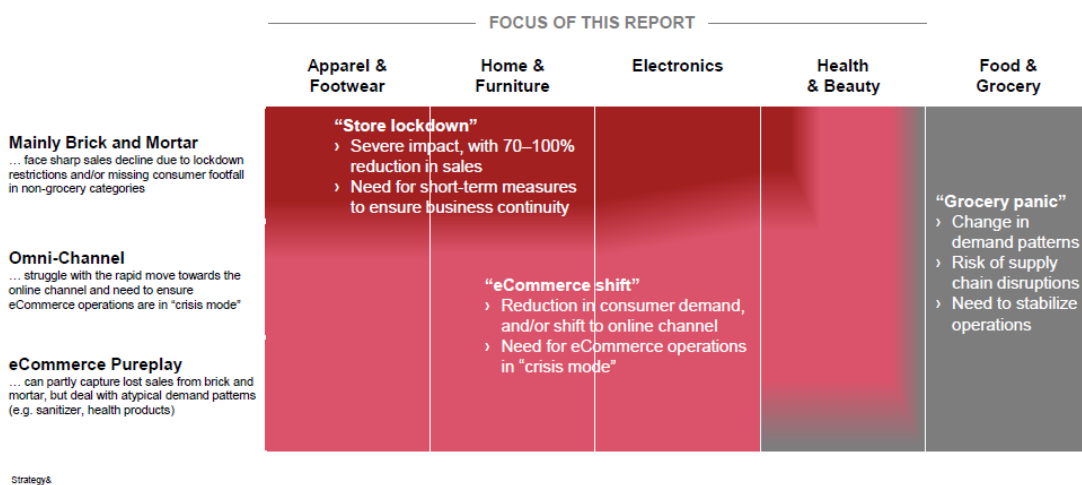


Figure no. 10: Sales impact from COVID 19 Sales footprint and category focus

Source: How retailers can manage and recover from COVID 19 Strategy& Retail & Consumer Team, Part of the PwC network, April, 2020, p. 5 (work cited)

More recently, on June 4, 2020, KPMG Advisory SRL let us know that: *"We are living through historic times that we neither expected nor anticipated"* (Richard Perrin, Partner, Head of Advisory KPMG in Romania). (Perrin, 2020) The new KPMG report – entitled *"COVID-19's impact on the supply chain. From survival to success: Are we ready for what will come?"* – presented the necessary measures to be taken by companies facing the current challenges in order to resurrect their supply chain operations. And this on the basis of the results of a recent survey which took the pulse of the supply chain activities of companies operating on the Romanian market (there were 24 of respondents: 30% of the companies from the Automotive industry, 16% from Construction, 16% from Retail, 12% from Manufacturing, 8% from ITC, 4% from Professional services, 4% from FMCG, 4% from Telecom & ICT, and 4% from Transport and logistics; more than 2/3 of these respondents confirmed having a Disaster Recovery Plan / Business Continuity Plan in place, the measures contained in it being only high level yet for a third of them). Research's results confirmed that there is still much more to be done to resolve the threat to the successful performance of operations represented by the current challenges of

supply chain operations within the pandemic, the supply chain remaining one of the biggest sources of vulnerability for companies. And in order to bring back and reinforce the supply chain operations the above mentioned KPMG report recommended both short-term (*safeguard people; understand key risks across operations and the supply chain*), and mid and long term actions (*development of workforce capabilities; digital transformation; suppliers risk management; supply chain optimization, production optimization; manage customer expectations and improve CX*).



Figure no. 11: Significant Academic & Business Partnership SCM 4 ECR Conferences images

Source: Romanian Distribution Committee, <https://www.crd-aida.ro/2017/11/wonderful-academic-business-partnership-2017-scm-4-ecr-conference/>

Instead of conclusions: *Looking to the Future*
with Confidence, Solidarity and Empathy

Caring for people in crisis and setting the stage for business recovery requires leadership so as to ensure a crisis-response infrastructure with well-established critical roles, and to

anticipate the crisis's evolution by developing adequate scenarios, caring for the reactive tendencies. (Nielsen, D'Auria, and Zolley, 2020) There is no doubt about the real need of proactive leadership, identifying risk's zones and engaging in hard and continuous work on reducing their impact, anticipating new needs, new problems and possible outcomes.

In March this year we showed how the new marketing environment is putting consistent pressure on retailers to better understand the new risks and to take the necessary actions within the current pandemic challenge. We also highlighted new trends in retail and shopping, and the health pressures, showing retailers' need of ensuring that consumers feel in control of their new CX, being a real need of adequately communicating, avoiding misinformation, and living together as a society. (Purcarea, 2020) On the other hand, we also saluted the continuous good work done by the Romanian Competition Authority with regard to both closely monitoring of the companies' behavior (including clarifying retailers' possibility of coordinating both freight to ensure the supply of commodities in all areas and home deliveries for people who cannot leave their homes within the context of the crisis situation), and its collaboration with the National Authority for Consumer Protection (ANPC), as Institutional Partner, concerning the platform "Food Price Monitor" (A. Launched on October 14, 2019, and allowing the comparison of more than 30,000 products from over 1,700 stores; B. On July 1, 2019 it was launched the platform "Price Monitor for Fuels" - information about the tariffs practiced by the large gas station chains; Business Partners: (A) Carrefour, Cora – Romania Hypermarket, Kaufland, Lidl Discount, Mega Image, PENNY Market – REWE, Profi Rom Food, Selgros Cash&Carry; (B) KMG International, Lukoil România, MOL România Petroleum Products, NIS Petrol România, OMV Petrom, Socar Petroleum). (Purcarea, 2020)

And as on April 17, 2020, Romanian-American University (RAU) celebrated its 29th Anniversary, allow us to recall the words of its distinguished Founder, Professor Ion Smedescu, Honorary Member of the Romanian Distribution Committee, who underlined that "marketing strategy means drift refusal", his approach reflecting an anticipation of today's so-called "customer decision journey" (popularized by McKinsey in 2009) – compared to the traditional "marketing funnel" ("sales funnel", "conversion funnel") – seen as a new mental map to navigate the continuously changing competitive landscape. (Purcarea, 2016) It is also well-known that Professor Ion Smedescu often spoke passionately about the world of human creativity and shared subjective experience, by constantly pledging for both, on one hand, a better understanding of customers' and prospects' needs and expectations from RAU, and on the other hand, having the right message and delivering it in the right time and right place, while responsibly and accountably teaching students to adequately apply what they have learned. And now there is a real time to learn from the current challenges, for all of us, and act accordingly.



Figure no. 12: April 17, 2020, Romanian-American University's 29th Anniversary: Looking to the Future with Confidence, Solidarity and Empathy

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/RomanianDistributionCommittee/>

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