

Cellular connectivity is the unsung hero of SA retail

By [Tobie van Schalwyk](#)

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The events of the past several years have seen the physical in-store retail experience enhanced by the growth and availability of digital solutions. But even though many South African retailers are aware of the importance of delivering an integrated customer experience that links the two environments, they tend to overlook the role cellular connectivity plays at their stores.



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Given the challenges of load shedding, a strong cell connection has become more than a nice-to-have, it is a business imperative.

Fortunately, there is a strong foundation already in place in the country when it comes to cellular coverage. From a user perspective, 99.9% of the population has access to at least a 3G signal while 4G/LTE has 97.7% coverage. Even though the trend in recent times has been to provide free Wi-Fi hotspots, a shift in awareness is happening brought on by the need to deliver a quality customer experience.

For example, when a customer is in the middle of an in-store purchase or using the retailer's app to find out more information about products, there must be a seamless, uninterrupted experience. Cellular connections, as opposed to Wi-Fi, are more reliable. With fewer signal interruptions, the chances of frustrating a customer or an employee diminish significantly.

Not every retail store has the benefit of a generator. And even the ones that do, the switchover is hardly ever as seamless when the power goes down.

There are also security considerations around Wi-Fi. As data privacy becomes a prime concern for consumers, cellular networks provide a safer platform than public Wi-Fi. Virtually every cybersecurity service provider cautions people against using hotspots to perform online transactions, banking, and other activities that require entering sensitive information.

Consumers and businesses alike want assurance that their data is not vulnerable to malicious actors. Cellular connectivity, with its advanced encryption and secure protocols, offers that peace of mind.

Delivering the satisfaction needed

Of course, we have all been in a situation where we try to connect to a store's Wi-Fi only to be prompted for personal details or to accept terms and conditions which very few people read.

Cellular connectivity, on the other hand, is automatic. There is no need to log in, and there is consistency in service regardless of the retail location.

Additionally, managing and troubleshooting Wi-Fi networks can strain a retailer's IT resources. Cellular solutions relieve this burden. For instance, the Nextivity IntelliBoost technology ensures that retailers can focus on what they do best: providing excellent products and services to their customers, rather than grappling with technical issues or worrying about the quality of in-store cellular coverage.

Going smart with connectivity

With the rise of smart retail solutions, reliable cellular connectivity extends beyond just making phone calls and sending messages. Mobile apps, payment systems, kiosk connectivity, and advanced inventory management tools all rely on uninterrupted access to data.

Having the peace of mind that always-on cellular coverage is available in-store can significantly enhance the overall customer experience. And with this, comes improved business operations and customer loyalty.

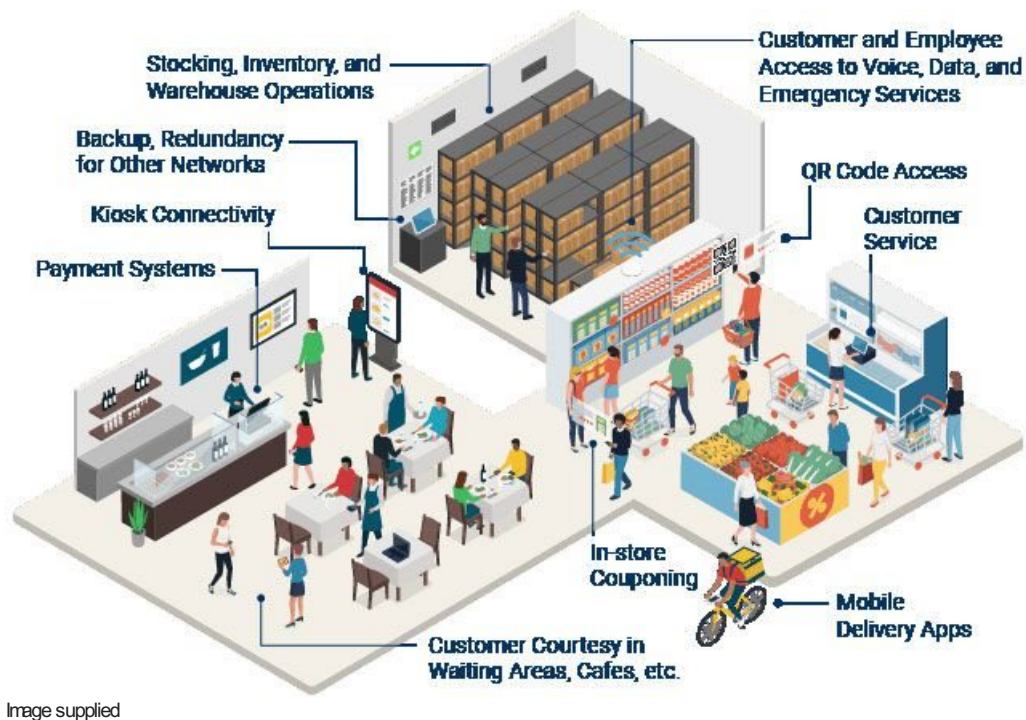


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Almost 80% of the 44 million internet users in South Africa rely on mobile devices for access. With mobile apps becoming increasingly commonplace, people are using their phones for everything from reading product reviews and redeeming coupons to leveraging retail loyalty programmes to get personalised discounts.

As the number of devices and apps grows, so does the demand for cellular coverage solutions that can handle the increased traffic and ensure smooth functioning.

Maintaining access

As we look ahead, the dependence on cellular connectivity in retail environments will only increase especially within the South African market given the challenges of load shedding. The next generation of consumers, tech-savvy and with heightened expectations, will demand instantaneous, secure, and uninterrupted connectivity.

Retailers that embrace and invest in robust cellular solutions will be better positioned to meet these evolving demands.

As the lines between the physical and digital retail realms continue to blur, cellular connectivity will be the bridge that ensures a seamless transition for customers and businesses alike. Beyond just providing a service, retailers will be able to revolutionise the in-store experience.

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