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Improve Your Customer Experience and Retention with Real-Time Visibility

When you think about companies that enjoy strong customer loyalty, Apple is likely one of the first that comes to mind. Apple's customers aren't just users—they're fans, often sticking to the Apple ecosystem for their personal computers, smartphones and tablets. There's a good reason for all that enthusiasm: Apple's dedication to providing the best customer experience.

In his book The Apple Experience: Secrets to Building Insanely Great Customer Loyalty, Carmine Gallo points out, "The most important component to the Apple experience is that the staff isn't focused on selling stuff. It's focused on building relationships and trying to make people's lives better." Apple understands that selling to this existing fan base is much easier than attracting new customers to their brand. And with its robust user base—more than 50% of US smartphone users have iPhones—you can bet that the company is leaning on insights and analytics to support its retention strategies.

Improving customer lifetime value is a big focus for most businesses. One of the best ways to keep customers coming back to you is to have great visibility throughout your supply chain. With real-time visibility, you can pinpoint where a product or the status of an order is at any given moment and make critical business decisions based on the data you gather.

In this playbook, you'll learn how real-time visibility can improve your supply chain from the warehouse to your customer's door. That visibility will help you delight your customers, improving your retention score and turning customers into loyal fans.

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Why is customer retention so important?

According to Forbes, gaining a new customer can be [five to seven times more expensive](#) than keeping an existing customer.

Why is that? Customer acquisition requires enormous investments in time, energy and money, and [consumers prefer](#) to buy from brands they know and trust.

Attracting new customers requires targeted marketing campaigns, which are often expensive, requiring significant resources to invest in multiple channels (including social, AdWords and other pay-per-click ads, email and beyond).

Brand loyalty, on the other hand, means driving repeat business via retention strategies to build relationships with your customers and deliver exceptional service. "What we're seeing among marketers across verticals is that the cost of customer acquisition has continued to rise," says Anne Hallock, GM of Platform at Flowspace. "In

an environment where that customer is more costly to acquire than ever before, the concept of the loyalty loop becomes incredibly important. Who is this customer who chooses to transact with you? How can you get them to transact with you again? The worst thing for a brand is the dreaded 'WIMO' email."

WIMO ("Where Is My Order?") inquiries can quickly waste your customer care team's time and energy—resources that could be spent on other important business tasks. Even worse, a customer who has to contact you to find out where their order is has already had a negative experience with your brand. They're sure to remember that when they prepare to order that product again.

Customer retention relies heavily on enhancing the customer experience, and fulfillment plays a considerable role. According to one survey, [85% of shoppers won't come back](#) if they have a negative online delivery experience.

Did you know?

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Source: FarEye Last Mile Mandate Survey, 2022

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How does real-time visibility help you retain customers?

From unboxing to word-of-mouth to a video or post going viral on social media, the delivery experience has become primary to consumers' interaction with brands. That experience is no longer a nice-to-have; it's become essential to customer retention efforts.

Providing your customers with a pleasant delivery experience keeps that loyalty loop turning. If their order arrives on time, as expected, with no hiccups or complications, they're much more likely to become loyal, repeat customers (and tell their friends/family about their experience). This is especially true if this is their first interaction with your brand or if you're trying to entice them into a long-term subscription.

By adding a layer of connection and visibility across your fulfillment operation, from inside the four walls of your warehouse all the way to your customer's door, you can spot inefficient processes or pinch points that slow fulfillment or affect delivery. For the greatest success, you need to be able to see inbound orders and outbound orders, how your warehouses are tracking against goals, and each order's location at any time.

Your customer success team needs to know what items have been packed, what's in transit, the delivery status of each order, delayed shipments and more. The good news is that software for fulfillment management has become

sophisticated, helping you avoid potential issues, such as weather events or backlogs.

For example, if there's an ice storm headed toward one of your fulfillment centers, you can easily change which warehouse you ship from to ensure on-time delivery.

This level of visibility allows your customer success team to surprise and delight your customers by reaching out before a delay affects them. Spotting a potential weather issue at one fulfillment center, you can tell your customer you're aware of the problem and that you're shipping from a different fulfillment center to get the product to them sooner. Or, you can reach out to a customer to say, "We know your product was scheduled to arrive by Wednesday, but we are experiencing delays. Please accept our apologies. Your new expected delivery date is Saturday."

reel

Reel navigates supply chain challenges with Flowspace

The pandemic was a busy time for many direct-to-consumer brands, none more so than Reel, a sustainability-focused, tree-free paper company offering toilet paper and paper towels made from bamboo. Supply chains were under immense strain across all product sectors, consumers were frustrated by stockouts in every category, and essentials like toilet paper and paper towels were in high demand.

Amidst this chaos, Reel was contending with fulfillment challenges. Their fulfillment provider was struggling to keep up with the rapid increase in order volume, and they had a blindspot within the delivery process.

They had the basics down: order received, order pending and order complete. However, "complete" on the provider's end meant only that it had left the facility—not that the order was ultimately fulfilled and delivered to the customer. "We were pretty much blind from the time an order was picked and marked 'fully complete' to when our customer actually received it," says Hector Omoigui, Senior Operations Manager at Reel. "If something went wrong with a delivery, we had trouble tracking where the order was and what caused the delay. It made us look unaccountable to customers."

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> – Hector Omoigui, Senior Operations Manager, Reel

At the time, Reel was an emerging brand working to scale while meeting heightened customer expectations. It wasn't a great look. "We had a lot of customer complaints," Omoigui says.

Because it took so long to close each customer complaint ticket (due to many calls and emails with carriers to find out what happened), tickets kept stacking up. It was a poor customer experience and a frustrating situation for the customer care team trying to keep everything on the rails.

Reel knew that achieving better visibility and more fulfillment capacity were no longer options—they were essential. Visibility would allow them to give answers to customers and build trust by showing Reel was on top of their orders.

After struggling with a couple of other solutions that still required too much manual work, Reel chose Flowspace to be their new fulfillment partner. It was a great match with both technology and expertise in place to offer real-time visibility and a connected network of more than 150 fulfillment centers.

The Flowspace platform allowed Reel not only to see at a glance what was happening with any customer order at any given time but to spot delays and notify customers ahead of time—often before customers even knew something was wrong.

"What Flowspace does really well is mix that technological aspect with the human element," Omoigui says. "They were really our partners throughout the pandemic and into the future."

That partnership became even more critical during the pandemic, when ongoing supply chain issues resulted in shortages at the supplier level. With inventory management devolving into mass confusion for many companies, Flowspace's software and large fulfillment network gave Reel the flexibility to shift capacity as needed. "From not having enough product at one warehouse and needing to temporarily shutter that one to having too much product coming all at once and needing to open a new warehouse, Flowspace had our back," says Omoigui.

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Actionable insights from real-time visibility

The benefits of real-time visibility go beyond tracking a customer's order. Paired with your marketing attribution software, order-level visibility allows you to see how your ad dollars are ultimately performing by driving purchases. It can also provide a real-time snapshot into how the cost of goods sold, average order value and cost of fulfillment interact. This helps ensure those ratios are appropriate and your profits are in line with where they need to be.

This type of visibility is a key part of discovering ways to achieve ROI from all departments. The data you collect through a visibility platform enables you to make important decisions faster, making your business more agile. As the pandemic showed us, that's an essential consideration for all brands, especially e-commerce companies.

Here are just a few actionable insights gained with real-time visibility:

- ✅ Improve delivery forecasts and bolster customer communication

- ✅ Coordinate with your marketing team to ensure inventory levels and avoid stockouts during promotions

- ✅ Find the pinch points in your fulfillment process - such as an inefficient staging process or popular products in sub-optimal locations for pickers

- ✅ Measure the performance of your network and make changes — such as a different fulfillment center carrier or a shipping method that will get goods to customers faster or more efficiently/sustainably

- ✅ Spot potential exceptions to proactively alert customers before they result in WIMO calls

- ✅ Improve inventory management using real-time insights and predictive analytics

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SUNDAYS

Sundays for Dogs cuts shipping costs by half with visibility and network optimization

Sundays for Dogs sells subscription-based fresh dog food made from healthy ingredients. The company needed help to balance skyrocketing shipping costs with their desire to provide faster shipping to their customers.

Sundays chose Flowspace to optimize their fulfillment network and fulfill inventory from warehouses as close to the end customer as possible. Thanks to immediate insights from the Flowspace platform into who their customers were and in what regions their product was most popular, they could make the best decisions on where to set up fulfillment operations most strategically.

Because of this data, Sundays expanded from one fulfillment center to three, optimizing its network using real-time visibility. This reduced their shipping costs by more than 50% while the company grew at a double-digit rate.

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> We were able to get our first, second, and third warehouse locations set up in one week, each time. I have been in logistics for years and that is incredibly fast. My team also raved about how amazing and responsive our Flowspace customer support representative has been.
>
> – Kelsey Chabolla, Director of Logistics and Supply Chain, Sundays for Dogs
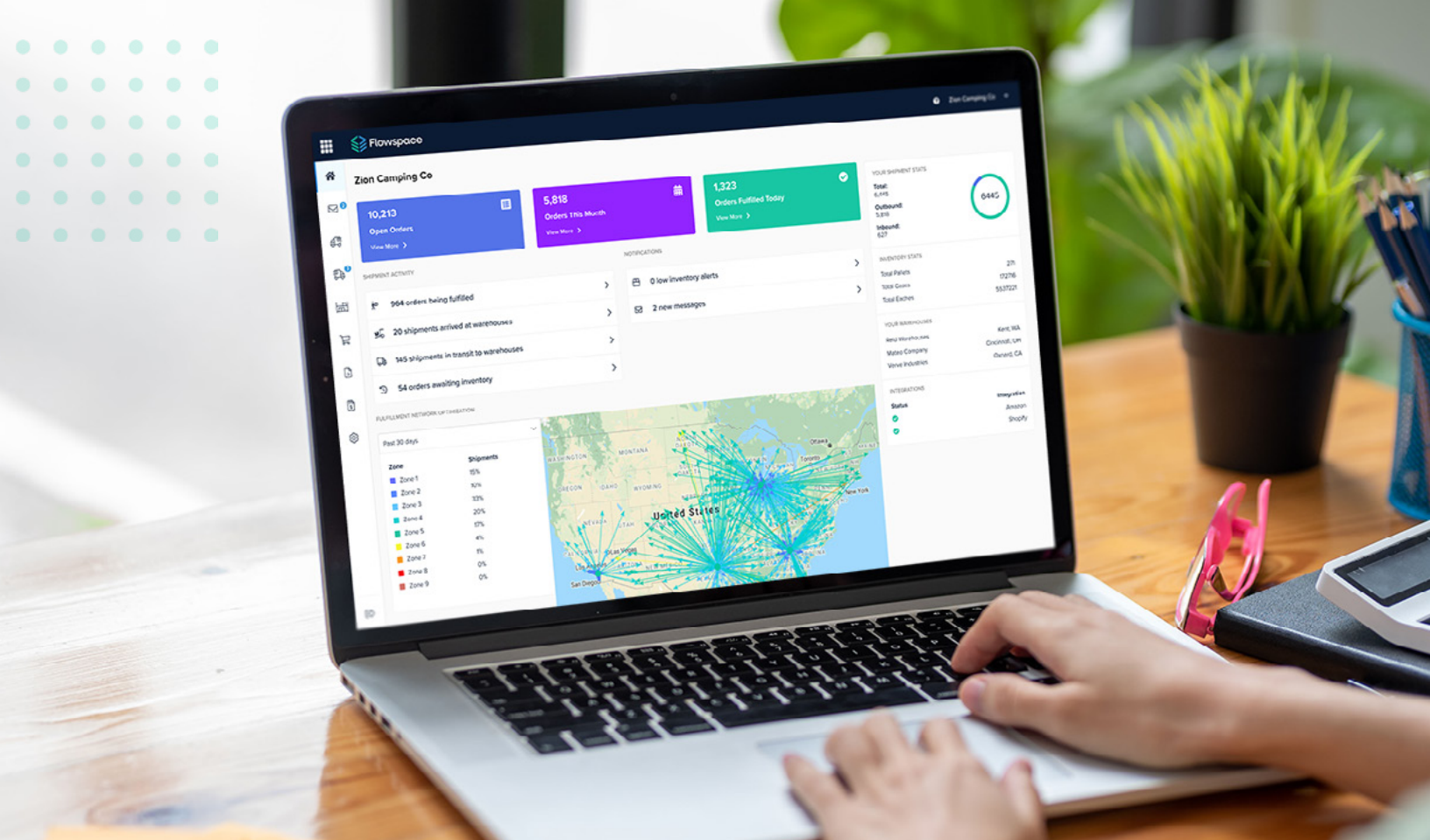
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Flowspace helps you retain customers through real-time visibility

Adding real-time visibility to your fulfillment process can help you retain (and delight) more customers. With centralized visibility and actionable insights reporting, you can improve your customer's experience and boost overall customer lifetime value.

The Flowspace dashboard also helps you better manage your inventory and spot potential stockouts before they occur. With customer acquisition costs increasing, you don't want to pay to land a customer only for their desired product to be unavailable.

Flowspace empowers you to track delivery expectations and in-transit SLAs, allocate inventory where it makes the most sense based on customer and sales data, and optimize your fulfillment network to best serve the needs of your business and your customers. With Flowspace, you can turn your customers into your biggest fans.

Flowspace

Powering independent fulfillment

The company's cloud-based OmniFlow software provides real-time visibility into inventory, orders, and fulfillment activity, centralizing all order sources in a single dashboard.

Integrated within a flexible network of +150 fulfillment centers nationwide, or connected to independent warehouse locations, Flowspace empowers brands to meet their customers' post-purchase expectations, providing efficient, reliable fulfillment across channels, profitably, and at scale.

Real-time visibility and rich customer insights give brands an opportunity to better understand their supply chain and the drivers of purchase, empowering them to keep customer acquisition costs low and retention high.

Get in Touch Today

+150
Over 150 fulfillment locations in-network

+500
Over 500 brands trust Flowspace

33m
33 million square feet of fulfillment space

99%
Over 99% on-time shipping rate

99.9%
Over 99.9% pick accuracy rate

<2HRs
<2 hours avg customer response time