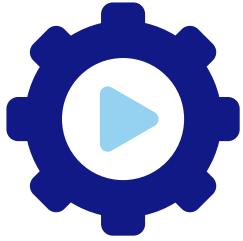


A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt and a tan apron, is smiling and touching a touchscreen monitor at a self-checkout station. A customer with long brown hair is partially visible on the left. In the background, a man in a tan shirt is looking towards the woman. The setting is a brightly lit grocery store with various products on shelves. A blue square logo with the word "GLORY" is in the top left corner.

GLORY

AUTOMATION WITHOUT ALIENATION



Since the time of the industrial revolution, automation has only gone one way.

But the rise has not been smooth and steady – rather coming in bursts as new technologies are created that are relevant to different industries.

Much manufacturing and agricultural work has long been automated or at least semi-automated, however the same has not been true for service-based sectors such as retail. Until recent years at least. But in the words of the great Bob Dylan, *“the times, they are a-changin”*.

While some back-end processes are slowly starting to see automation, such as robots being put into retail storerooms, the biggest change we are seeing is at the front-end with the introduction of self-service kiosks and self-checkout (SCO), bringing about the automation of the order and checkout process. The growth of this Customer Experience Automation (CXA) has been explosive, with a global survey from the ECR Retail Loss Group stating that fixed SCO was deployed by **96% of Grocery respondents** and **77% of Non-grocery respondents**.

But the question that should be on every retailer’s mind is, what is the effect of this on the customer journey?



The global retail automation market size was estimated at **USD 24.12 billion in 2023** and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of **9.3% from 2024 to 2030**.

[Grand View Research](#)

## Let's face it, automation has a bad name – at least when it comes to customer experience.

For many, the word automation is a cold word. It seems like the very antithesis of good customer service. The death of the personal human touch. So, the question we face is, *can we automate parts of the customer experience without alienating the customer?*

If we're being honest, automation can bring about all those negative outcomes... when implemented poorly. But self-service doesn't need to mean less service. If implemented well, with the customer always at the centre of our decision-making, then automation can be more than a way to cut costs and increase efficiency – **it can actually expand and improve the customer journey.**

Customers have already embraced self-service in huge numbers, and research demonstrates that many consumers prefer the speed, privacy, and control over their own order or checkout process. But responses are certainly mixed, with many feeling they are essentially trading a better experience for a quicker one, or that they had little choice because all the staff for manned checkouts have quickly disappeared. This can lead to customers feeling alienated from the business, unappreciated, and that the retailer is only interested in profits.



# 69%

When asked why they think self-checkout numbers are increasing, **69% answered that it's to save the retailer money.**

[thegrocer.com](https://www.thegrocer.com)



## It doesn't have to be this way.

CXA can be more than an exercise in cutting labour costs. It can offer more than just trading the human touch for a slightly quicker checkout. With thoughtful implementation, it can actually improve the experience in a number of ways. And in an age where ecommerce retailers are gluing more and more people to their sofa, the in-store customer journey has never been more important.

Let's look at how retailers can embrace automation without alienating their customers.

# What are the challenges with introducing automation?



## Initial Investment/ROI

Of course, one challenge with introducing automation has always been the initial investment required. But for businesses in a position to look at the longer-term benefits, the ROI is usually pretty clear. And this is confirmed by the levels of self-service deployment we see already across the retail sector.



## Integration with Legacy Systems

Another key challenge is around the complexity of integration with existing systems. Many retailers have layered on modern systems over legacy systems as they have introduced new technology over the years, resulting in a spider's web of software and hardware with varying degrees of flexibility and interoperability. This can create a range of issues with getting each system to talk to each other effectively.

However, this can usually be overcome either with flexible, vendor-agnostic solutions, or even more effectively by moving the entire ecosystem to a unified commerce platform.



## Customer Experience

But perhaps the most consequential challenge of all is that of introducing automation while maintaining, or even enhancing, the customer experience.

Consumers have expressed frustration with self-service devices themselves (most of us have come to expect the unexpected item in the bagging area). They've spoken frequently of there not being enough staff to man the SCO section, leaving them waiting for error codes to be cleared or age-restricted items to be approved. And of course, some people, especially of an older demographic, just prefer the manned checkout system they are used to, but find that there are none available, or the lines are too long due to only one or two manned lanes remaining open. And of course, cash payers often have no option, as many retailers decide to leave cash payment options off of their SCOs, immediately alienating a significant part of the population.



60%

**Over 60% of staff believe they cannot cope with the number of self-checkout machines they are assigned to manage.**

*ECR - Working on the Frontline of Retail Self-Checkout Report*



“

“Common pitfalls include a lack of optimisation, a lack of personalisation and a failure to recognise changing customer needs, habits and preferences.

Many take a “set-it-and-forget-it” approach. Maintaining or increasing customer satisfaction requires a solid commitment to improving the experience.

When a business focuses on enhancing and adding services, improving the user experience and creating opportunities for increased personalisation, most customers will opt to self-serve.”

*Forbes - The changing face of customer experience in the self-service economy*

# Why should businesses embrace automation?

The old, familiar reason that automation is popular in business is efficiency and cost reduction.

But this is a new age. Today, automation technology can offer a lot more. **When implemented with the customer in mind**, and not solely focused on reducing costs, modern solutions can actually benefit the customer and not just the retailer. It can offer things that large companies just can't accomplish at scale without it, such as personalisation and privacy.

## Automation Benefits

### Labour Optimisation

Whether labour costs or labour shortage is your biggest challenge, automation can help you get the best out of your workforce.

### Labour Reallocation

Automating repetitive tasks frees up employees for more complex and valuable work.



### Privacy

Whether embarrassment, social anxiety, or simply not being in the mood to interact – privacy is a strong benefit for many.

### Meeting Customer Expectations

Modern consumers are used to creating the experience they want, and most today want the option of self-checkout, even if they don't want to use it all the time.

### Personalisation

The ability to personalise the experience based on a customer's own purchasing behaviours is a powerful benefit of CXA.

### Speed & Convenience

The number one reason customers choose self-service is to spend less time queuing.

### Consistency

Automation can provide consistency in the customer experience.

### Better Decision Making

CXA allows you to gather more data, understand your customer's behaviour better, and make more informed business decisions.

# How to automate **effectively**



## 1. **Think customer-first**

The first step in successful CXA is not an external one. It's a way of thinking. It's the foundation your strategies are built upon. You can create all the efficiencies and cost savings in the world, but if your customer isn't happy, you're building your house on sand.

Keeping this principle at the heart of every discussion around new technology will help to ensure a positive outcome.



## 2. **Empower humans, don't just replace them**

We understand that the ROI on these solutions is largely based on labour savings, and that will always be part of the equation. But there is a balance to be had. Many large retailers have leaned so hard into the potential savings to be had, that customers are left feeling abandoned and alienated from the business.

CXA can also be seen as an investment in the customer experience. A way to empower your workers to do more for the customer, be more available, and create a better environment. Squeezing every last penny out of a customer visit is not always worth the return if the customer begins to feel like just another number through your door.



## 3. **Personalise**

Personalisation is becoming more and more expected. It's one of the primary benefits we get for handing so much data over to the businesses we interact with, and can create a genuine win-win for both customer and retailer. Businesses who don't capitalise on this opportunity are leaving a lot on the table, because this is a chance to make self-service offer something more to your customers.

Your staff can't track every customer and offer them tailored suggestions and deals, but well-implemented CXA technology can do that.

**71% of consumers** expect companies to deliver personalised interactions. And **76% get frustrated** when this doesn't happen.

McKinsey

# Why should businesses embrace automation?



## 4. Test and refine

It's worth remembering that automating the customer experience is a huge shift. It's not a "set it and forget it" situation. When such significant change is implemented, it's important to monitor the impact, listen to your customers, and refine your approach. Asking customers what they think about how the new system is working for them – whether the layout is right, the balance of human support, the usability of the solution – this is how you find the right balance between efficiency and service.



## 5. Provide a smooth transition to human support

There will be issues that arise with any system, whether it is down to the customer, the technology, or the implementation. One of the biggest frustrations consumers express about automated systems is that they can't transition to human support easily. Whether this is an automated phone system or a self-checkout device, most people are happy enough when everything works the way it should. But if things don't go according to plan, customers want to be able to easily reach out to a human being for support. For retailers, that means there being enough staff to manage the devices and support the customer, whatever the time of day.





Automation is a powerful tool for raising productivity. But if it is wielded only for its power to cut costs, you risk alienating your customers.

With today's automation solutions, you have an opportunity to do so much more, to make those gains without sacrificing the customer experience. But it takes putting the customer at the centre of your decisions. It takes thoughtful implementation, regular review to see that it is still serving the customer, and fully exploring the options you can implement to enhance their self-service journey. Most customers do like self-service, but they don't like being abandoned to it without choice and without support.

Glory is a full-spectrum retail solutions provider, delivering everything from SCO to kiosks to cash automation, and even tying everything together with a complete unified commerce platform. Have a chat with one of our retail experts to discover how we can help you implement smart automation solutions to raise efficiency, empower your staff, and enhance the customer experience.



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