

# A new dimension in the customer experience

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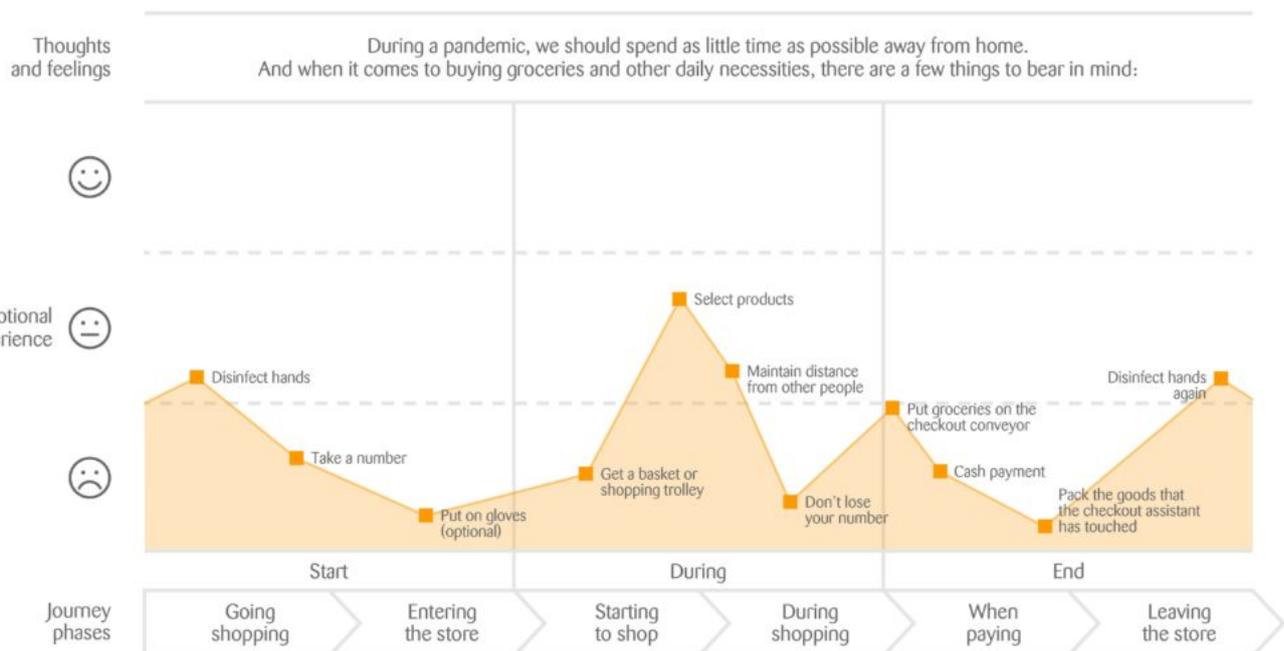
Reading time: 4 minutes

The COVID-19 crisis has altered customer behaviour virtually overnight. New rules are in place about how to interact with other people and how to shop.

Customers are more mindful of stricter hygiene standards and keeping their distance. Disinfectant is available in almost every store, and taking a number has become normal. At the same time, digitalisation has - out of necessity - gained greater significance in society and [everyday life](#). The coronavirus crisis has engendered drastic behavioural changes and created new expectations, which in turn has profoundly influenced the customer experience. However, [brick-and-mortar retailers](#) can also satisfy customer needs during the current situation by using creative approaches and new tools. This will pay dividends once the COVID-19 crisis is over, in the form of stronger customer connections and greater loyalty.

## Shopping during the crisis: a restrictive experience

The lockdown has led to a shift in both the customer journey and patterns of demand. Hygienic precautions have utmost priority for food retailers, most of which are still open. Precise monitoring at the store level is what is needed to quickly react to new guidelines and changes in customer behaviour. The following image illustrates the current customer journey for food retailers:



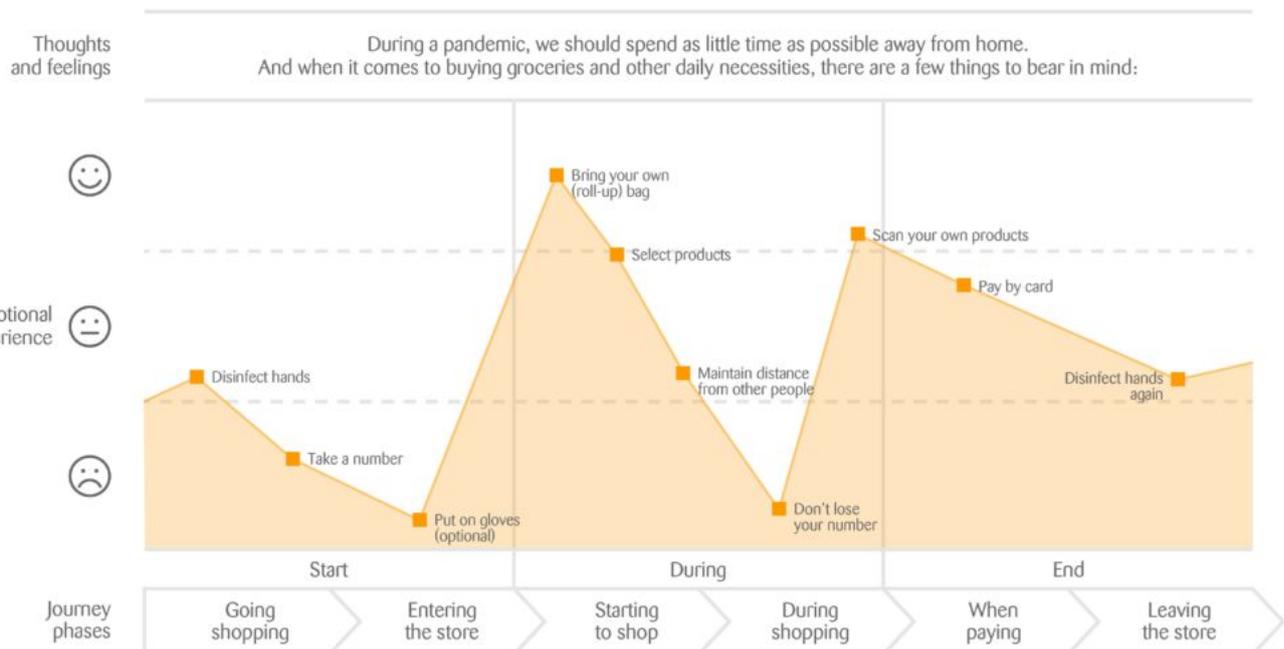
The image clearly shows that shopping is not an experience at present but, rather, an absolute necessity that leaves end customers with a feeling of restriction.

### First priority: minimise obstacles

But what can retailers do to rapidly adapt the processes in their stores to the current situation and to remove as many barriers as possible for customers due to health concerns? Several possible technical solutions already exist:

- Introducing an automated ticket system as an alternative to manually distributing numbers at the entrance.
- Expanding contactless systems, from payment solutions via smartphone to check-in apps.
- Displaying item availability via an indoor navigation app, which would make purchases more efficient and reduce the amount of time spent in the store.

These types of solutions can be easily and, most importantly, quickly integrated into the existing systems and immediately bring added value for retailers, customers and employees. The following image shows what an optimised customer journey might look like:



### Offer creative solutions

Establishing a contactless drive-in and delivery system is an example of a creative approach for retailers. Supermarkets with large parking lots can set up a drive-in store. Customers can use an app to select food items in advance, which are then prepacked into boxes. A time frame for picking up orders can then be assigned to customers via the app. Purchases are then paid for directly online and orders can be loaded into the car boot on site. The benefits

are obvious:

- Employees and customers are equally protected against infection
- Panic buying is prevented
- Markets can better plan for the demand
- Deliverers, e.g. taxis or couriers, continue to have a source of income

### The customer experience after the crisis: The new normal

The world of brick-and-mortar retail will be different once the lockdown is over. Making sound plans about how to generate revenue again as quickly as possible after the lockdown will prove decisive. Now is the time to create the [organisational and systemic conditions](#) for a [successful multi-channel strategy](#), as many customers have become used to [digital alternatives](#) and appreciate contactless options. This will lead to more cohesion between digital and physical platforms.

Companies must also rethink the function of their brick-and-mortar businesses. Stores need to offer an exciting and highly personalised shopping experience, regardless of where customers shop.

The current crisis will undoubtedly accelerate the digital transformation. Companies that have managed to strengthen customer relationships and adapt to different habits and customer behaviour in advance by coming up with innovative and creative solutions during the crisis are sure to be successful again in the future.

