

The \$14,056-a-Minute Mistake: Inside Retail's Peak Season Crisis

After a chaotic 2024 holiday season marked by outages, long lines, and lost revenue, U.S. retailers are under pressure to rethink their peak season strategies. In this exclusive interview, we sat down with Patrick Morton, Director, Field Operations North America Services and Darrell Maton, Vice President, Retail Services Solutions at Diebold Nixdorf to unpack what went wrong—and what needs to change. From modular service concepts to shift-left support models, they reveal the bold moves retailers must make to stay operational, agile, and profitable when it matters most.

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Many U.S. retailers were caught off guard. We saw widespread system outages, long checkout lines, and a lack of emergency support—especially in flagship stores. The average downtime of 164 hours across 2024 was a wake-up call. Retailers underestimated the operational strain of peak season, and it cost them—both in revenue and customer trust. Never forget: 75% of all holiday sales are spent in-store according to Deloitte.

It's a mindset issue. Many retailers still view downtime as an IT problem, not a revenue problem. But when each minute costs \$14,056, that's not just a tech hiccup—it's a business crisis. We're working with retailers to shift that perspective, having in mind that U.S. retailers experienced an average of 164 hours of IT outages in 2024—nearly a full week of lost operations across store systems, self-checkout lanes, and order fulfillment tools.

Very few. Most retailers don't have the infrastructure or partnerships in place to scale on demand. We've seen stores run out of checkout capacity mid-season because they didn't plan for volume spikes. Or even worse, they have unused capacity available but are not able to leverage short-term. Long lines at checkout cost U.S. retailers a staggering \$37.7 billion annually, as customers abandon their purchases in frustration. Agility isn't just a buzzword—it's a survival tactic.

For the U.S. market, it's extended Service Hours. Retailers need support that matches their trading hours because issues don't clock out at 6 PM—especially during weekends. Too many issues went unresolved for hours because support ended at 6 PM. That's unacceptable during peak for retail as we're talking about around \$750B spent in-store from Nov 1-Dec 31.

Yes, that's a common trap. We are seeing U.S. retailers invest heavily in new POS or SCO systems but overlook the service layer that keeps them running. A shiny new device won't help if it breaks down on Super Saturday—when foot traffic surges by 58% compared to the daily average—and no one is available to fix it. We're encouraging retailers to think beyond the install—service readiness is what ensures uptime, customer satisfaction, and ROI.

Honestly, we're already seeing that shift in the U.S. Promotions, flash sales, and e-commerce spikes are creating mini-peak moments year-round asking for services that are evolving to be always-on, with flexible SLAs and rapid deployment options that match this new retail rhythm.

Staff burnout. During peak season, store teams are stretched thin. If systems fail, they take the brunt of customer frustration. Addressing this requires more than just responsive support—it involves enabling staff to resolve common issues themselves, without waiting

for external help. Providing training and tools that empower teams can reduce downtime, improve morale, and enhance operational resilience. Retailers who invest in their people—not just their tech—are the ones who'll thrive under pressure.

LET'S BE HONEST— WAS 2024 A FAILURE FOR U.S. RETAIL OPERATIONS DURING PEAK SEASON?

IN LIGHT OF THE NEARLY TRIPLED COST PER MINUTE, HOW CAN RETAILERS ENHANCE THEIR READINESS FOR DOWNTIME EVENTS?

RETAILERS TALK ABOUT AGILITY—BUT HOW MANY ARE ACTUALLY PREPARED TO LIVE UP TO THE AGILITY PROMISE?

IF YOU HAD TO BET ON ONE SERVICE THAT WILL MAKE OR BREAK PEAK SEASON 2025, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

ARE RETAILERS TOO FOCUSED ON TECH UPGRADES AND NOT ENOUGH ON SERVICE READINESS?

IF PEAK SEASON BECAME A 365-DAY REALITY, HOW WOULD YOUR SERVICES CHANGE?

WHAT'S THE ONE RISK NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT—BUT SHOULD BE?

2024 exposed systemic weaknesses across the board. It wasn't just a U.S. issue—it was a global signal that reactive service models are not enough. A solid service strategy should be built around modularity, speed, and scalability. Ensure you can flex your operations in real time, with preventive maintenance, mobile checkout deployments, and real-time analytics. The peak season chaos isn't just in execution—it is in preparation.

Downtime is no longer a technical inconvenience but a strategic vulnerability. Retailers should consider implementing proactive diagnostics, rapid-response engineering, and 24/7 service coverage. With real-time performance dashboards, retailers can act before systems fail. The cost of inaction is simply too high. The goal is to make downtime predictable—and therefore preventable.

Agility is a critical capability in today's retail environment. Building scalability into infrastructure and services enables organizations to adjust operations as needed—whether by expanding mobile checkout options, incorporating refurbished equipment, or modifying support coverage. Being agile means anticipating demand and preparing in advance, rather than reacting after challenges arise.

For me, it's preventative maintenance. It's the foundation of everything else. If you don't identify and resolve hotspots before peak season, you're setting yourself up for failure. Pre-checks ensure every store is peak-ready—with a cleaning, rebuilding and testing service, including the replacement of worn parts retailers lay the foundation for a successful peak season.

Technology without service is risk. We've seen retailers deploy advanced systems without aligning support—resulting in costly downtime. That's why retailers should champion a service-first mindset: every innovation needs to be backed by modular, scalable support that performs under pressure. Especially when it comes to multivendor environments retailers need an end-to-end coverage—because shoppers care about the experience, not the brand behind it—and neither should you.

It would validate the direction we're already heading. Our modular service architecture is built for continuous scalability. Whether it's mobile checkouts, preventive maintenance, or real-time analytics, we're designing for a world where "peak" is the new normal—and resilience is the baseline.

Supporting frontline staff during high-demand periods involves integrating mobile-first tools into daily operations. With access to intuitive mobile solutions, employees can manage tasks like troubleshooting, inventory checks, and customer assistance more efficiently. This approach not only improves responsiveness but also builds confidence and autonomy among staff. When staff feel supported by smart tech, they're more agile, less stressed, and better able to deliver exceptional service—even under pressure.

THE TAKEAWAY

Peak season is no longer a short-term sprint—it's a high-stakes stress test for every part of your retail operation. The lessons from 2024 are clear: downtime is too costly, self-checkout needs proactive care, and agility is non-negotiable. Retailers must shift from reactive fixes to preventative strategies, empower frontline staff through shift-left support, and scale operations with modular, multivendor-ready solutions. Success in 2025 will belong to those who prepare early, act decisively, and partner smart. Now is the time to align with Diebold Nixdorf—your service-first partner for peak performance, every day of the year. [Explore our retail services here.](#)

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