

OPINION

Kirana 2.0: The rise of the digital Indian retailer

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Covid-19 has shown the world the importance of technology, and kirana stores have realised that tech adoption is no more an option but a requisite

By Kumar Vembu
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Covid-19 showed us the true value of the presence of small businesses in our neighbourhoods. Take *kirana* stores, for instance. Amidst all the hullabaloo they were the only ones that stayed open throughout the lockdown when the rest of the country had come to a standstill. They were the ones that gave us our daily bread. When the whole nation stayed indoors, these silent warriors stayed open. To serve us the essentials.

For all the problems the pandemic caused, it has accelerated the push towards digital transformation among *kiranas* like never before. An EY survey among *kirana* store owners across 12 cities has found that 20 per cent of them had started leveraging online platforms for supply chain needs and delivery during the lockdown. While digital adoption is on the cusp of demand, there are three factors which would prove the success of the digital transformation.

Omnichannel and customer convenience : With the pandemic, consumer behaviour changed drastically. There was a need for convenience from ordering, pick up, delivery, contactless ordering, contactless-delivery, and contactless-payments. *Kirana* 's had to use the opportunity by going online and serving the customers omnichannel.

With the branded mobile app for consumers to order, the *kiranas* got new customers, expanded boundaries, grew faster, and were confident

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to compete effectively in their neighbourhood. To improve the experiences of the consumers at the store with minimal contact, businesses will have to provide self-service kiosks or self-checkout counters and endless aisle. Consumers going forward demand this shopping convenience from browsing in-store, buying on mobile, or buying online.

Go mobile : The *kirana* business is mostly a one-man-show. An owner is responsible for every function at the store — inventory management, brand dealership, manage demand and supply, accounts, billing, ordering to delivery, etc. As most of the above functions are manual, it is time-consuming for the *kirana* owners to manage and supervise all the operations. Because of this, they have not been able to focus on the changes happening in the market and adapting the same to their business.

In addition, they never had the bandwidth to evaluate a new vendor or add mobility with their existing vendor. It was therefore important for vendors to provide this freedom of choice to *kiranas* to go digital in simple steps by introducing mobility to their store operations. For example, mobility on billing and order-taking, stock-taking and auditing, delivery and payment, etc

Data-driven decision-making : Data is a key enabler for a business to understand and improve their customer experience. While e-commerce platforms have sufficient data on the preferences of consumers, who visit their website, many offline stores do not have the same level of understanding of what is selling at their store and what is not.

For example, in the case of a *kirana* , if the owner chooses the right solution, he will understand the customer behaviour like fast-sellers, the non-moving, profitable brands, suppliers that help drive profits, etc. This data-driven approach will drive efficiency as business owners will be able to focus more on their business growth and make faster decisions.

Roadmap to transformation

The pandemic has led to a renewed trust in the local *kirana* stores with a surge in consumers visiting the local stores in both metros and non-metros over large supermarkets. *Kiranas* , by bearing the wrath of the unforgiving virus outbreak, have proven themselves resilient.

Now the country unlocks itself and gets back to its ways, *kiranas* should make the right business choices to upgrade themselves to take on the biggies and online competitors. Covid-19 has shown the world the importance of technology and *kirana* stores have realised that tech adoption is no more an option but a requisite. The owners should understand what technology would work for their businesses and accordingly embark on a new lease of transformation. True digital transformation happens when a retailer brings in convenience, contentment, consistency, and confidence to all stakeholders in their business.

Kiranas have been the lifeline of Indian neighbourhoods. It's time they now used the technology lifeline. It would then be *kirana banega crorepati* !

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COMMENTS

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