



Clienteling and unified commerce is the key to success for any retailer.

# PUTTING THE CUSTOMER FIRST

*Sam Kliger, chief executive officer and founder of KWI, the unified commerce solution, offers insights into the market, trends and his leadership approach.*

That same candor that guided Sam Kliger, chief executive officer and founder of KWI, in recognizing retailer pain points at the point of sale and inventing a customer-first solution, also carries his day to day efforts and grounds the company culture.

To deliver a unified commerce solution that exceeds retailer expectations, KWI's organizational culture prioritizes, first and foremost, its customer.

Even more so today, merchants and retailers yearn for connected commerce which, in turn, streamlines the shopping experience for their customers – across all of the touchpoints.

With the right technology in place, it's clienteling that may differentiate the best retail experiences.

#### Debate with Candor

Addressing the customers' wants and needs with agility necessitates a strong yet candid culture of debate across teams.

"It's very easy for a manager to be candid with their team and deliver tough feedback, but it's much harder to do the same to your manager. We encourage this at KWI, as well as a culture of debate," said Kliger.

As Kliger mentions, this culture solicits feedback both ways, regardless of rank. Whether manager to team member or vice versa, KWI improves speed of

decision-making by breaking down barriers to communication to enact large scale innovation.

Directly attributed to its honest and open company culture, KWI competes with larger tech companies, who outnumber in headcount, but forfeit agility.

#### Think Like the Merchant

This immense customer focus, in Kliger's case, also effectively bolstered new relationships. Kliger's first customer, wound up being his business partner and mentor too.

"Dan [Markowitz] taught me everything about retail and the art of being a merchant," said Kliger. Markowitz, an original Benetton client joined KWI's executive team thereafter.

Kliger brought the tech experience, while Markowitz brought the shared vision of delivering beautiful products and a thorough understanding of the customer, which still serves his company mission today.

#### Lead Ahead of the Times

In the first years of KWI, more than 30 years ago, Kliger focused on building a strong team of doers who managed with a top-down approach. But as the company grew, Kliger quickly realized that you need a strong foundation to build a strong company. You can't just have stars at the top. It wasn't until the year 2000, which sparked rapid company growth,



Sam Kliger, Chief Executive Officer & Founder of KWI.

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**SAM KLIGER,**  
CEO & FOUNDER, KWI

that Kliger put this into practice.

At that time, “the world of computing changed,” and Kliger was faced with the revelation that flipping his leadership style and asking the right questions would warrant unspeakable opportunity.

“I had to look inside and ask myself: ‘Do I have the right people on my team?’” added Kliger.

Kliger's advice to change-oriented leaders navigating the swift changes in technology fields is to understand that certain people may have a skill ceiling, while others can meet present challenges, while empowering the business to the next level.

Rather than experiencing mounting frustrations in employee limitations or acute inability to grow within the job, Kliger pointed to identifying strong performers early on – and putting those people on your roster, fast.

#### What's Next?

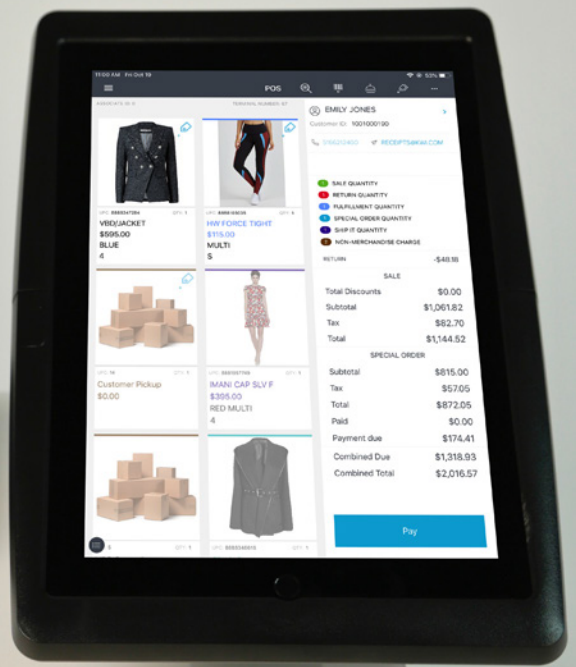
Before Kliger was delivering unified commerce solutions through KWI, he was a waiter at a hotel. This experience was vital in showing him how to deliver top-level customer service, which extends to his current work for retail clients.

In the same way, one assigns to memory how a certain guest likes his coffee or who wants her beach chair set up in the morning, Kliger believes that level of personalization is now coming to retail.



Kliger believes treating the customer as one channel means a universally frictionless shopping experience.

Having the right systems in place means greater connectivity to inventory levels, and much more.



In the world of e-commerce, data plays a vital role in converting additional purchases, from recommendation engines and personalized offers to reminders about items left in your cart.

“Having a heightened level of personalization and customer service is what will make brands stand apart from the crowd,” reiterated Kliger.

It’s time for that caliber of commerce to enter into physical stores by way of new technology and artificial intelligence in physical stores. The goal is to improve the shopping experience.

For KWI, all users operate on a singular version of its software platform, with new releases appearing monthly or even more frequently.

This speed of iteration means KWI clients get the lot: frequent update notifications for apps with bug fixes, software enhancements and new features.

While traditional business applications are designed to be much slower, with companies typically releasing a new software update once a year, KWI aims to unify users, and in turn their commerce.

When clients aren’t at the disposal of software technicians who schedule visits to the store to update their systems, they’re able to focus on their greatest value-add activities.

Convening market demands, trend information and client needs, KWI produces software which is both agile and flexible.

“Speed and agility is necessary to compete in 2019 and beyond,” added Kliger.

One of these market demands KWI is attuned to is the taste for experience. But with the rise of experiential retail and the pop-up shop, retailers may be foregoing the obvious.

As retail shifts towards more experiences, retailers are still struggling to solve unified commerce. Identifying, or recognizing, a singular customer across all channels is another point of confusion.

“Even when the data exists and is passing back and forth, most retailers are still operating with disconnected e-commerce and retail store systems,” said Kliger.

Putting the customer first means delivering frictionless experiences in store and online, regardless of the permanence of the storefront. Even retailers burgeoning into pop-up retail to increase brand awareness and hook new consumers need a unified, single commerce platform to provide the service levels that people need.

“A pop-up store can’t feature the full catalog of your merchandise, so you need to have systems in place to be connected to the vast trove of inventory they could sell,” added Kliger.

The emphasis is in collecting customer data, only what’s right, useful and necessary, and putting it to use.

**Tech at their Fingertips**

Underlying all this data, is the superior

clienteling customers crave to keep them coming back.

Clienteling is the key to success for any retailer. To differentiate yourself from the competition, human interaction is essential.

Kliger believes an apathy for human interaction will cause any business to suffer.

“If you’re not creating touch points for your customer and reminding them to come in and check out new products—if you’re not delivering personalized, customer service—they’re going to shop online,” he added.

Citing a waning investment in its salespeople, Kliger believes fashion and beauty companies should treat its sales associates as assets, the “stylists” who are directing consumers’ purchase decisions by their influence and authentic human connection.

Not simply a cog in the machine or a cheery greeter on the sales floor, the human element is essential and leaves a visible fingerprint across industries.

Kliger continued with an example; “When a person can make their own stock trades online, why do they need a broker or investment manager? Because humans can provide services you can’t get online: confidence, reassurance and a personalized perspective.”

Diagnostic, guided and personalized, KWI customizes their technology offerings based on what the client needs, not based on the “latest bells and whistles”

which lack utility.

When the technology is right for the merchant’s business, the customer feels it, and the sales associates is a critical pillar in activating this value.

Sales associates are increasingly leveraging technology to optimize their selling capabilities. Most retailers have mobile POS that are transactional in nature, but they’re not leveraging the data available at their fingertips.

To optimize selling capabilities, sales associates should spend less time on menial tasks and more time with customers. With mobile POS, they can look up recent purchases, check for offer codes and even accept online returns from a mobile POS.

The result is to bring more people into stores.

Kliger believe it’s as simple as the merchant performing online in likeness to their abilities in store, and vice versa.

“You’re not an online or in store customer, you’re a brand customer. Treat the customer as if he or she is one channel,” said Kliger.

This means price consistency across the board, promotions are universal and discounts match.

Merchants who offer the same offers in store and online, while adding in the right blend of technology, data and superior clienteling stand to proceed with the candid demeanor that the customer craves.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**\$2.4**

Trillion dollars in global e-commerce sales

**\$4.5**

Trillion dollars in e-commerce sales projected for 2021

**15%**

Compounded annual growth rate of e-commerce sales

**64%**

Total shopping budget of U.S. consumers spent in physical store

**\$300**

Billion dollars in North America Retail Apparel Sales

**\$490**

Billion dollars in Asia-Pacific Region Retail Apparel Sales

**\$300**

Billion dollars in Western Europe Retail Apparel Sales