

The Telco Retail Scorecard

25 questions to assess your retail channel like a consultant would

By Will Gibson, Vice President, Amplifier Consulting at Maplewave

I can tell you more about a telco's commercial health from an hour in its stores than from a day in its boardroom. That is not a throwaway line. Over twenty years I have walked operator stores in more than seventy-five countries — flagships in the Gulf, mid-mall kiosks in the Caribbean, dealer shops in small-town Africa, high street estates in Europe. The pattern never changes. The strategy deck says one thing; the floor tells the truth. Stores cannot lie. Every decision the business has made, and every decision it has avoided, is standing there in plain sight: in the window, in the queue, in the advisor's opening line, in the state of the stockroom.

This scorecard is that first hour, written down so you can run it yourself. Twenty-five checks, grouped into five buckets, each scored one to four. It will not replace a proper diagnostic, and I am honest at the end about what an hour cannot tell you. But walk three of your own stores with this in hand and you will know more about your retail channel by Friday than most leadership teams learn in a quarter.

One condition. Walk as a customer, not as an executive. Announced visits produce theatre: the floor gets swept, the best advisor gets pushed forward, the manager appears from the back office for the first time that week. Theatre scores well and teaches you nothing. Go unannounced, dress down, and watch what the store does when it thinks nobody important is looking. That is the store your customers get every day.

HOW TO USE THIS SCORECARD

Pick three stores: your best performer, your worst, and one chosen at random. Walk each one unannounced and score all twenty-five checks from 1 to 4. A score of 1 means poor, 2 means inconsistent, 3 means good, and 4 means you would happily walk a competitor through it. That gives each store a total out of 100.

Do not average the three results. The gap between your best and worst store is a finding in its own right, and often the most important one. A full scoring sheet is included at the back of this guide.

The Kerb Test

The first five checks happen before I have spoken to a single member of staff. Most retail leaders walk straight past this stage, because familiarity is a kind of blindness. When you have seen your own window five hundred times, you stop seeing it at all. Your customers have not stopped seeing it. For many of them, it is the only part of your store they will ever engage with.

1. The ten-metre read. From across the street or the mall corridor, can I tell what this store wants me to do? A good window makes an offer. A weak window makes noise: six competing messages, a wall of vinyl, or a brand statement so abstract it could belong to a bank. If a passer-by cannot extract one reason to walk in within three seconds, the window is decoration, not retail.

2. Campaign currency. I look for the sun-faded poster, the expired promotion, the hero device that launched two ranges ago. A window advertising an offer that ended three weeks ago tells every passing customer the same thing: nobody here is in charge of the details. Customers extend that judgement, fairly or not, to your network, your billing and your service.

3. The threshold. Does the entrance pull me in or process me? Queue barriers before I have arrived, security furniture, dump bins of ageing accessories, a sign taped to the door. The threshold is where a customer decides, half-consciously, whether this visit is going to be pleasant or endured. Plenty of stores lose the sale in the doorway and then wonder why conversion is soft.

4. Five-second orientation. Standing just inside the door, do I know where to go? Where to buy, where to get help, where to pay, where to collect. If I have to ask, the layout has failed its first job. Confused customers default to the queue, which means your most expensive resource, advisor time, gets spent giving directions.

5. The sensory baseline. Lighting, temperature, music, smell, clean floors, tidy cabling. None of these wins a sale on its own. Together they set the price a customer expects to pay and the trust they are prepared to extend. A premium proposition sold in a tired room reads as a contradiction, and customers resolve contradictions by believing the room.

FIELD NOTE

Everything in this bucket suppresses footfall before your conversion metrics even wake up. That is what makes it dangerous: the customers it costs you never appear in any report, because they never came in. You cannot coach your way out of a store nobody enters.

The Floor Walk

A good telco floor sells even when nobody is talking. It answers questions, invites hands onto product and moves people gently towards a conversation. A poor floor does the opposite: it hides margin, kills curiosity and turns advisors into human signage. These five checks are about what the space itself is doing.

6. Dead zones. I find a corner and watch for ten minutes. Where does nobody stand? Every store has cold spots, and every cold spot is rent being paid for nothing. Usually the cause is obvious once you look: bad sightlines, product nobody wants at eye level, or fixtures arranged for the merchandiser's convenience rather than the customer's path.

7. Living devices. Are the demo units charged, unlocked, connected and loaded with something worth touching? A dead demo phone is worse than no phone at all. It is a promise broken at the exact moment of interest. The same goes for tethers so short you cannot lift the device and screens looping a video nobody can interrupt. If customers cannot play, they will go and play online, where your store adds nothing.

8. The accessory story. Accessories are the easiest margin in the building, and most stores treat them like an afterthought. I look for whether cases, chargers and audio are attached to the devices they belong with, at the point where the buying decision happens, or exiled to a pegboard wall the customer visits only by accident. The difference between those two choices is worth real money across an estate.

9. Beyond the handset. Can I see, touch and understand fibre, TV, streaming and smart home anywhere in this store? Or is this still a phone shop wearing posters about broadband? Operators everywhere are asking stores to sell converged products, but very few floors give those products a physical presence a customer can experience. You cannot merchandise a router with a poster and expect an emotional purchase.

10. Somewhere to decide. Complex purchases need somewhere to sit. A family choosing a converged bundle is a twenty-minute conversation, and twenty minutes standing at a chest-height counter is an endurance event, not an experience. If every surface in the store is built for a transaction, the store will get transactions. It will not get decisions.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

You know a floor is working when you see customers touching product without being prompted, when an advisor and a customer are sitting down mid-conversation, and when the highest-margin categories occupy the most valuable space. A working floor makes the sales conversation easier before it has even started. That is the test: does this room help the advisor, or does the advisor spend the day compensating for the room?

The Human Layer

Now the people, which is where the money is genuinely made or quietly lost. Before scoring this bucket, hold one principle in mind: advisors almost always behave like the environment and the management around them. When you find weak behaviour, you are usually looking at a symptom. Score it honestly anyway. Symptoms are evidence.

11. The greeting. Within my first minute in the store, am I acknowledged as a person or triaged as a ticket? There is a world of difference between warm eye contact with a genuine opening line, and a flat “what are you here for today” that files me into a queue. The greeting sets the emotional temperature of everything that follows, and it is the cheapest thing in this entire scorecard to fix.

12. The cluster. Advisors gathered at the counter, talking to each other, while customers orbit the floor unattended. Every retail leader has seen it, and it is never really about laziness. The cluster tells you whose comfort the store is run for, and it usually forms where management routines are weak and nobody owns the floor. I count how many seconds it survives after a customer walks in.

13. Questions before answers. I ask about a product and count the questions that come back before a recommendation arrives. Who is it for? What do you use today? What matters more, price or flexibility? Most advisors answer the question they were asked and miss the customer entirely. An advisor who asks three or four good questions before recommending is worth three who can recite specifications.

14. Fluency beyond the phone. Then I ask about broadband, or TV, or the smart home kit in the corner, and I watch what happens to the advisor's confidence. Handset fluency is nearly universal. Convergence fluency is rare, and it is where the growth targets live. A hesitant answer does not just lose that product; it sends the customer online to compare your bundle on price alone, stripped of every advantage a human explanation could have added.

15. Service into sales. I watch a bill payment or a SIM swap. Is it processed and dismissed, or does the advisor use the moment? Service footfall is the cheapest sales traffic you will ever receive: the customer is already yours, already present, already talking to you. A store that processes service and never converts it is running its most valuable pipeline straight back into the street.

TRY THIS YOURSELF

The two-product test. Ask an advisor to help you choose a phone, and once the conversation is flowing, add: “Actually, could I sort my home internet out at the same time?” Then watch. Some advisors light up and widen the conversation. Some freeze, apologise, or point you to a leaflet. Whichever you get, you have just learned more about your training reality than any completion report will ever tell you.

The Transaction

An advisor can do everything right and still lose the sale at the point of processing. The transaction layer is where systems, process and policy either back the conversation or betray it. This is the bucket executives most often underestimate, because from head office a transaction is a line in a report. On the floor, it is ten minutes of a customer's patience being spent in real time.

16. Clock a simple sale. I time the simplest thing in the store, a prepaid SIM or an accessory, from “yes” to done. Minutes matter more than almost anyone admits. Every extra minute on a simple transaction is advisor capacity you have already paid for being burned on administration, and it compounds: slower transactions build queues, queues build walkouts, and walkouts never appear in your conversion data.

17. The turned screen. During the sale, does the advisor share the screen with the customer or disappear behind it? Ten minutes of silent typing behind a monitor is where rapport goes to die. The customer stops being a participant and becomes a spectator at their own purchase. Watch for the advisor who angles the screen, narrates what is happening and keeps the conversation alive. That behaviour is trainable, but the system has to make it possible.

18. The paper trail. I count signatures, printed pages and photocopied identity documents. Every sheet is friction for the customer, cost for the business and, in plenty of markets, a compliance risk sitting in a filing cabinet. A store drowning in paper is usually a business that has digitised its marketing and left its transaction stuck in another decade.

19. The honest queue. Waiting is not the killer. Unexplained waiting is. Is the queue acknowledged, managed and honestly estimated, or do customers stand in ambiguity wondering whether they have been seen at all? The stores that handle this well are not always the fastest. They are the ones that tell the truth about the wait and keep people informed while it happens.

20. Failure recovery. At some point a system will stall mid-sale. It always does. What happens next is one of the most revealing moments in retail. Does the advisor have a plan B, a script, a way to hold the customer and the sale? Or does everyone stand watching a spinning wheel while the moment dies? How a store handles failure tells you more than how it handles success, because failure is where process, training and culture all get tested at once.

THE COMMERCIAL COST

Transaction friction is a triple tax. It cuts the number of customers each advisor can serve in a day, it lengthens the queue for everyone still waiting, and it sours the final memory of customers who did buy. One slow system or one bloated process is simultaneously a capacity problem, a conversion problem and an experience problem. Fixing it pays back three times over.

The Engine Room

The final five checks look for management. Not the manager personally, but management as a system: standards, coaching, measurement and pride. In my experience, the spread between an operator's best store and its worst is rarely about talent. Same brand, same products, same systems, wildly different results. What differs is the daily standard someone holds, or fails to hold.

21. Find the manager. Where is the store manager right now? On the floor, watching, coaching, stepping in at the right moments? Or in the back office, mid-spreadsheet, managing the store through a screen? The best store managers I have met treat the floor as their office and the back room as an occasional necessity. The worst have it exactly the other way round, and their numbers show it.

22. The back-of-house truth. The front of the store is what the business wants you to see. The back is what it actually is. A glance through a stockroom door tells you plenty: chaos back there always leaks onto the floor eventually, as missing stock, slow fulfilment and advisors who disappear for five minutes at a time. The staff noticeboard is its own diagnostic. If what is pinned to the wall is three months old, so are the standards.

23. The number of the day. I ask an advisor what number they are chasing today. A well-run store produces an instant, specific answer, and the number connects to something the advisor can actually influence. A shrug, or a vague gesture towards “targets”, tells you the performance conversation is happening somewhere above the shop floor and never landing on it. People cannot chase what nobody has made real for them.

24. Energy and pride. Do the team look like they would shop here? I listen to how advisors talk about the brand when they think it does not matter: to each other, to a customer in passing, in the jokes they make. Pride is not a poster value. It shows up as small acts of ownership, a straightened display, a customer walked to the door, and it is one of the most reliable predictors of everything else in this scorecard.

25. The exit moment. And finally, the leaving. As I walk out, does anyone attempt a next step? An app download, a follow-up, an invitation back, even a proper goodbye. The last thirty seconds of a visit is the cheapest loyalty programme an operator will ever run, and most stores spend it looking at the next person in the queue. First impressions get all the attention. Last impressions get the repeat visit.

FIELD NOTE

If you score several stores and the results vary wildly, resist the urge to blame the weak stores. Wide variation across an estate is almost never a talent problem. It is a management-system problem: unclear standards, inconsistent coaching and measurement that stops one level above the floor. The fix belongs to the centre, not the store.

What your score is telling you

Total each store out of 100 and be honest, because a flattering score helps nobody. Here is how I read the bands after years of doing this walk.

85 to 100. Match-fit. This store would hold its own anywhere in the world. The work now is protection, not correction: keep the standards from eroding as people rotate, and use this store as the living reference point for the rest of the estate. Excellence that lives in one store is an asset. Excellence that spreads is a strategy.

65 to 84. Solid bones, leaking margin. The fundamentals are in place, but inconsistency is quietly taxing every trading day: a dead demo unit here, a missed service-to-sales moment there. This is usually the fastest payback band, because most of the fixes are already known inside the business. What is missing is prioritisation and follow-through, not ideas.

40 to 64. The store is working against your people. At this level, advisors are compensating daily for the environment, the processes or the management system around them. Training alone will not fix it, and neither will a refit alone. The risk here is spending money in the wrong order. Sequencing matters more than budget: diagnose first, then fix the things that unlock everything else.

Below 40. A cost centre wearing your brand. Hard to hear, but this store is charging you twice: once in operating cost and again in brand damage, because every visit teaches customers to prefer your competitors or your website. The encouraging news is that from this starting point, disciplined basics move the number fast. The first twenty points are the cheapest you will ever buy.

One more reading matters as much as any single score: the spread. If your three stores land within a few points of each other at a high level, your operating model works and your challenge is refinement. If they are twenty or thirty points apart, your challenge is not strategy at all. It is execution, and execution problems have owners.

What an hour cannot tell you

I will not pretend this scorecard is the whole job. An hour tells you where the friction lives. It does not always tell you why. A weak greeting might be a training gap, a rota problem, a morale problem or a queue system pulling advisors into triage. A slow transaction might be the system, the process wrapped around the system, or a policy nobody has questioned since it was written. Walking a store shows you the symptoms with brutal clarity. Separating symptoms from root causes, and putting a commercial value and a sequence on the fixes, takes structure.

That structured version is the work my team and I do inside the Amplifier Retail Benchmark Assessment: a diagnostic built on a 135-question framework, scored across 1,350 available data points, covering the store experience, customer journeys, advisor behaviour, systems, operations and the role of retail in your wider channel mix. The output is not a report for a shelf. It is a prioritised action plan your teams can start executing the week after the readout.

But start with the hour. Walk your three stores this week, score them honestly, and see what the numbers tell you. If you would like a second pair of eyes on the results, or you suspect the symptoms run deeper than an hour can reach, I am easy to find.

SCORE YOUR STORES, THEN LET'S COMPARE NOTES

Walked your stores? I would genuinely like to hear what you found, and where your estate landed. And if the scores raise questions an hour cannot answer, that is exactly what the Amplifier Retail Benchmark Assessment is built for.

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About the author: Will Gibson leads Amplifier, the consulting division of Maplewave. He has spent twenty years in telecoms retail across more than seventy-five countries, working with operators on sales channel strategy, store design and the frontline behaviours that turn footfall into revenue.

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Score each check from 1 to 4. A score of 1 is poor, 2 is inconsistent, 3 is good, 4 is world class.
Total out of 100.

#	Check	Score 1–4
BUCKET 1: THE KERB TEST		
1	The ten-metre read	
2	Campaign currency	
3	The threshold	
4	Five-second orientation	
5	The sensory baseline	
BUCKET 2: THE FLOOR WALK		
6	Dead zones	
7	Living devices	
8	The accessory story	
9	Beyond the handset	
10	Somewhere to decide	
BUCKET 3: THE HUMAN LAYER		
11	The greeting	
12	The cluster	
13	Questions before answers	
14	Fluency beyond the phone	
15	Service into sales	
BUCKET 4: THE TRANSACTION		
16	Clock a simple sale	
17	The turned screen	
18	The paper trail	
19	The honest queue	
20	Failure recovery	
BUCKET 5: THE ENGINE ROOM		
21	Find the manager	
22	The back-of-house truth	
23	The number of the day	
24	Energy and pride	
25	The exit moment	
TOTAL (out of 100)		