

## DFS – Sofa retailer offers real-time live video assistance to online shoppers

A more personal customer experience, bringing the in-store experience to the online channel

### The Challenge



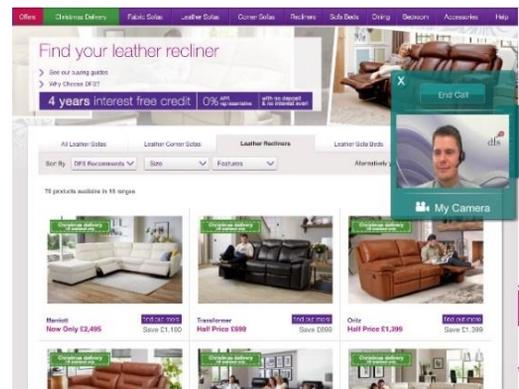
DFS has been selling high-quality sofas in the UK for 45 years and has seen many changes in the retail environment over this time. Consumers no longer consider shopping for big-ticket items to be an exclusively bricks-and-mortar experience. And with shoppers continuing to move online, multi-channel retailers are challenged to create an online experience to match the personal service offered in store.

DFS' commitment to being an innovative, world-class retailer had helped the company expand from a strictly bricks-and-mortar business into a multichannel market-leading sofa retailer. But time never stands still in retail and in 2011, the company decided to take a fresh look at the online customer experience on its website.

"With more and more of our customers choosing to research and even purchase their sofas online, it was critical for us to offer them the same level of service they would receive in our stores from speaking with one of our showroom staff face to face," says Arron Burton, Online Operations and Compliance Manager at DFS.

DFS advisors were already available to answer online questions via text chat, 24/7, 365 days a year. However, for those customers who prefer to combine the convenience and ease of online shopping with more personalised assistance, an extra service was needed: the option to choose to have a conversation with a DFS advisor via live video assistance.

A sofa purchase can be a considerable expense and it's a very personal decision, with countless shapes, prices, colours and fabrics to choose from. DFS therefore wanted to provide the service of on-hand experts who could answer shoppers' questions and offer advice not only in-store but online too.



The challenge would be to manage any concerns with live video up front, understand how comfortable customers would be with live video assistance and address inevitable concerns around privacy and security. Added to this, DFS needed to ensure that any system would be simple to set up and use, to enable the advisors to concentrate on the customer and not the technology.

## The Solution

DFS began its journey into live video assistance in 2011 with a pilot to assess customer reaction. At the time, only a small number of pioneering companies were offering live video interactions with customers. DFS selected a cloud-based solution from Vee24 that included voice, video and text, as well as co-browsing capability. The pilot was a great success and customers were enthusiastic about the option to see and speak to a live assistant whilst on the DFS website. To proactively engage with customers, and at the same time put less technology-savvy consumers at ease, and address potential concerns about the use of online video, DFS adopted a 'nudge' feature.

If customers clicked on the link to initiate a video assistance session, they were shown a brief overview of the service before being connected with an advisor. The introductory video first clarified that the interaction was video-enabled to prevent customers from assuming they were opening a text chat window. Next, it explained that, when the customer was connected to the DFS advisor, they would be able to see the advisor, however, the DFS advisor would not be able to see the customer unless the customer chose to turn on their camera and be seen.

As the number of video assistance advisors and video-enabled desks increased, DFS replaced the nudge feature with a fixed tab that makes it possible for customers to immediately connect to live video assistance.

## Co-browsing provides superior customer experience.

The Vee24 solution also gives advisors the capability to share screens with customers when they need help browsing the website or filling in forms. To address any concerns about privacy and safety, the advisor makes it clear that they are only screen-sharing. The advisor has no access to the customer's desktop or computer and cannot access the customer's personal data.

“Preparing staff for their on-air interactions has been relatively simple,” explains Arron Burton, “The Vee24 system is easy to use and there was no additional training required beyond typical training that phone agents undergo”. All advisors need to do, since they are working with a camera, is to take a few minutes at the start of their shift to position themselves properly so their face is visible in the camera area. Advisors are trained to make eye contact with the customer and to act as if the customer were right in front of them to make the experience as personal as possible.

## The Results

Online video assistance, in some cases, goes above and beyond an in-store experience. Burton recalls a recent interaction with a customer who wanted advice on what type of sofa to buy. She used her laptop webcam to give the DFS advisor a virtual tour of the room in need of a sofa so that the advisor could see the space, colours and décor. “It evolved into a great conversation about the different things she could potentially do with the room and how she could change it. We could not have had that level of engagement in any other medium that we currently offer,” says Burton.

DFS’ Net Promoter Scores for video assistance transactions are, at 90, the highest of any channel – higher than face-to-face transactions in the company’s retail showrooms and well above the retail average NPS of only 28.

The Vee24 solution is also proving highly successful with DFS’ in-store appointment booking service, generating leads that have an 85% conversion rate. The average order value for video-assisted appointments is higher than the average telephone order value and higher than the average self-serve online order value.

***“Video assistance has proven to deliver incremental online sales for DFS and has helped us reach out to customers earlier in the buying process. NPS ratings from customers using this service have been outstanding. Video assistance is a key channel to market for us moving forward.”***

**- Graham Mould, Web Sales Director**

## What's next for video assistance at DFS?

Burton predicts that video assistance will continue to grow and evolve at DFS. Since its inception, the live video assistance capability has grown to 20 seats and 35 video assistance advisors in the UK where the hiring of over 10 extra staff for video assistance has been recently approved.

DFS is looking to launch video assistance with its Sofa Workshop brand in the first half of 2015 before preparing to launch the Vee24 solution on its Dutch website later this year.

“Given the proven success of the system on our UK and Irish websites, we are excited to gain the same benefits from our Sofa Workshop brand and our newly-launched Dutch website”.



DFS is also challenged with an increasing volume of customers using mobile and tablet devices, with over 50% of its traffic coming from these devices. Given this reality, DFS is looking to launch the service on both its mobile and tablet websites, with no download required by the customer. The solution has already been launched within DFS' tablet application, 'DFS Live', this year.

“Expanding this offering onto mobile is very important to us. Video assistance is optimal of mobile devices, it is a lot easier to use than text chat and we can still show the customer our products while we speak to them which is critical to maintain our great conversion rates and NPS Scores,” says Burton.

With video assistance, the possibilities are endless, especially when it comes to issue resolution. Time spent resolving issues can be reduced considerably if a customer uses a video connection to help the company identify the problem and quickly resolve it, instead of having to book a home assessment.

“Our ambition is to be world-class and we see video as a key part of that. It offers a very personal customer experience, without you having to leave the house,” concludes Burton.