

# IT LEADERS

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# LUNCH CLUB

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AN INTERVIEW WITH CARL PHILLIPS



**The retail and Ecommerce market has never been so competitive and with many retailers advertising the same products for the same price, customer experience is fast becoming the only differentiator.**

We caught up with Carl Phillips, Group IT Director at AO to discuss how AO are dominating the electrical appliances market as well as how he thinks the Ecommerce landscape will evolve over the coming years to better serve its customers.

**Carl, could you give us a brief introduction as to how AO was established?**

AO was founded in 2000 back when buying white goods was a real hassle. AO's founder, John Roberts realised that no one really enjoys buying white goods and one evening in the pub with his friend, he made a £1 bet that he could give customers a better service by offering white goods online. Needless to say he took up the challenge and as they say, the rest is history.

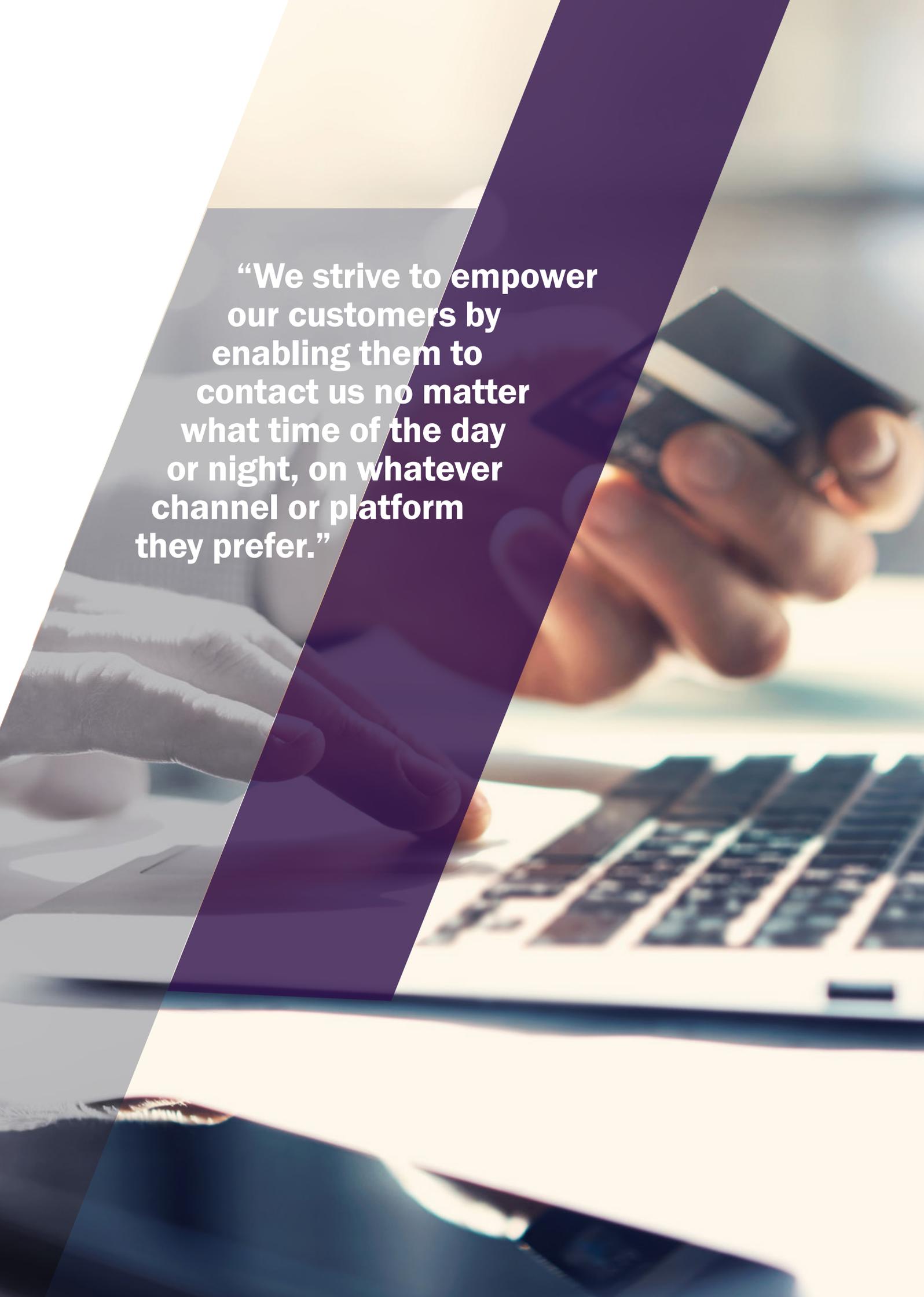
I joined the AO team as a software developer back in 2008 and I think it's fair to say I've witnessed a lot of significant changes since then. We've evolved from originally using mostly other brands to sell our products, acquiring our first (2 man) delivery team to opening a 360,000 square feet warehouse in Crewe and our first distribution centre in Germany.

One of our biggest changes however, was expanding our product portfolio from just selling white goods to a

broader range of electrical appliances. We now offer our customers over 4,000 products ranging from TVs, laptops and phones to cameras and smart home appliances.

**It must be difficult for you to differentiate the AO brand from the competition when you're essentially selling the same products as your competitors, so how do you think AO stands out from the crowd?**

What I think makes AO different is our approach to providing a high-tech/high-touch service approach. What this means is that our systems are designed to make shopping as frictionless as possible, but we also have highly skilled call centre staff who give that personal touch and are given lots of autonomy to just do the right thing for our customers. We strive to empower our customers by enabling them to contact us

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark credit card over a laptop keyboard. The person is wearing a dark blue jacket with a gold button. A large, semi-transparent purple diagonal shape is overlaid on the image, containing white text. The background is softly blurred, showing the laptop and the person's hands.

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AO LOGISTICS HEAD OFFICE & DISTRIBUTION CENTRE | CREWE

no matter what time of the day or night, on whatever channel or platform they prefer. This may be over the phone, through our website, text or via social media. We're relentless in doing whatever it takes to make our customers lives that little bit better.

**Let's consider more futuristic technology advancements, like drone technology. How do you see that shaping the future of e-commerce?**

I think it's really positive to see drone technology advancing and while I think it is set to make some headway in the future, I actually see driverless vehicles making more of an impact on increasing the speed of deliveries first.

As I'm sure you'll have seen in the news, driverless vehicle trials are underway across the world and these vehicles have the potential to drastically reduce delivery times as deliveries will no longer be affected by compulsory driver rest breaks, staff shortages or drivers getting lost. This could spark the rise of same day deliveries regardless of where in the country your goods are being dispatched from.

**Do you envisage IoT and AI also having a big impact in the near future?**

Actually, we're already using IoT sensors in our recycling plant to monitor our crushing machine. We have the capability to recycle over 700,000 appliances every year, so data will play a crucial role in providing predictive

maintenance capabilities to ensure we don't experience any downtime.

This project is still in its infancy but providing these sensors prove to be effective at our recycling plant, then we'd also look to potentially extend this technology into our warehouses and delivery lorries.

IoT technology in warehouses has the potential to serve as a hub to boost efficiency and speed throughout the entire supply chain. I expect to see more retailers to start using devices, sensors and hands-free wearable technology to reduce manual labour and increase speed and shipping accuracy in the coming years.

**It's certainly an exciting time for the sector but what would you say is the one key thing that really inspires you to get up in the morning?**

This might sound cheesy, but our customers. I'm a people person and I genuinely care about ensuring AO deliver exceptional service around the clock. At the end of the day it's not only customers that keep me in my job but they also have the power to influence the way the market moves. Their ever-changing requirements and expectations keeps me on my toes and I love that feeling of never quite being sure what innovative technology is set to make waves through the industry next.

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