

EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL: COMING ALIVE

Experiential retail is a powerful tool in the fight to get footfall through doors. A place to dwell, get connected and experience the total brand, as Retail Focus discovers.

To persuade people to step inside their stores, retailers have to offer shoppers something more than pure product: an interaction that enhances their customer journey. A memorable and enjoyable experience that facilitates social sharing and will have them returning time and time again.

'Today's connected consumer can buy anything, anywhere at anytime. Retailers have responded by creating rich, dynamic, interactive experiences from high tech to high touch, from analogue to digital, while incorporating relevant food/beverage and other services into their overall offering,' says Sterling Plenert, senior vice president at CallisonRTKL.

So what should a retailer consider when implementing experiential retail in store? 'The store design is one part of the equation,' says Plenert. 'However, there is a whole ecosystem of strategies that need to be aligned and implemented consistently. From empowering the sales associates to differentiated merchandising strategies, from in-store programmes and events to online social media channels: they all need to work together to create a dynamic experience that is worth coming back to again and again.'

Amy Thorn, customer experience strategist at Household Design, says 2016 will be an exciting time for physical retail with customers demanding more such as personal, seamless experience, human, tactile interaction and to be inspired. 'Last year we were wowed by Lush's Oxford Street store, which provides 360-degree immersion with demonstrations, interactive displays and a multisensory event space. In 2016 physical retail will provide more brands with the opportunity for tactile discovery, where brands come alive, bring communities together and facilitate social sharing. Where customers are engaged through storytelling, sensorial interaction and enhanced, theatrical service offers.'

Created with the help of Design Time, the Lush flagship indulges Lush lovers into a complete immersive brand experience. Offering a haven in the chaos of London, the store introduced several new concepts for the first time, including a Gorilla Perfume gallery, Hair Lab, regular events and classes, large fountain sinks for experiencing products and the Lush Spa with treatment rooms including a double room.

Down the road at The Toy Store, Propability created a Nerf Target Practice Range, allowing children to play with Nerf blasters and darts for target practice.

'The target range delivers an element of fun but also stimulates the senses. It's not just the fact that you press a button and things happen. Following the first press of the button from selecting your gender, the overall look and feel of the gallery responds accordingly. We have pink for girls, blue for boys, neon lighting, and voice and sound effects. Highly active and heroic music plays and the game has begun. The gallery is very fun; its competitive but it also provides the people interacting with it a high sense of feel good factor,' explains Tyrone Cano, owner of



Propability. 'The action music is immersive; the overall experience of moving through the gallery, testing the product and testing your target skills stimulates the senses. The countdown and various sound effects and lights create the entire experience. It's about developing the use of the product that bit more.'

Cano says the aim of experiential retail is to glorify the product as much as possible. 'It's about delivering an environment that allows you to do this but without losing the focus on the fact that you have to sell. The main consideration is how to compromise the experience with the product and not jeopardise the space. Secondly, there has to be a point of difference - create something that is fun and different to what's in any other store. You need to stimulate the senses, offer something that online shopping and just walking around a store picking product up off a shelf can't do. Create an experience that is different. Finally, money is always a consideration - you need to be clever with the budget,' Cano says in his experience, while there is no end to what you can do, sometimes the cleverest ideas aren't always the most expensive.

A sense of community is something that Green Room Design has implemented in several recent projects. At The North Face store on London's Regent Street, customers are invited to make use of lockers and store their shopping while exploring the city. A notice board where the retailer's "neverstoplondon community can grow also features in store. Regular participatory events encourage people to share their desire to train and explore, offering another dimension to the retailer's brand engagement.

Over at the Sun & Sands Sports flagship at The Dubai Mall, the brief was to create community by allowing customers to trial and compete at their favourite sports in store. Green Room created three giant interactive zones for football, basketball and running to give customers the chance to immerse themselves in a digital version of the sport. 'Their results are displayed live on an in-store leader board and the opportunity for sharing on social media is taken up by almost half of the participants,' explains Mike Roberts, chief executive officer of Green Room.

Roberts says relevance to a retailer's key target audience is fundamental, along with commitment to keep curating and updating the experience. 'Empowerment and co-creation: a way for customers to interact and share their experience.'

Burberry used the power of technology during the 2015 festive period by partnering with several technology giants to bring interactive experiences to the masses. The retailer worked alongside Google to create The Burberry Booth that enabled customers to star in a personalised version of its festive campaign. Powered by Google and using the latest real-time video stitching

technology. The Burberry Booth enabled customers to appear alongside some of the festive film's cast members in a 15 second personalised edit of the campaign. The film was made by capturing individuals jumping in the style of the advert, and then placing the footage within the film itself. Once their bespoke film had been created, The Burberry Booth instantly sent customers a shareable copy via YouTube, Twitter or email. Each film was accompanied by the Burberry Festive Film's soundtrack, Cosmic Dancer by T Rex.

The 2015 Christmas season also saw the retailer partner up with Dreamworks Animation and NOVA to create the first interactive luxury marketing campaign using new 3D technology. Using the NOVA media visualisation platform, Burberry designed a brand new digital out-of-home experience, featuring computer-generated versions of its iconic heritage scarf that users were able to personalise and play with on the world famous Curve screen in Piccadilly Circus, London. The campaign allowed up to five users to explore the full range of Burberry scarves on their mobile device, monogram their favourite and see it appear on the giant screen where it flew around directed by the motion of their device. They then had the option to purchase their scarf on Burberry.com or receive directions to the nearby Regent Street flagship store. The experience launched on 14 December and ran 24 hours a day until 31 December.

'Experiential is all about creating added value. For most products it's easy to buy online and get them delivered at home or to click and collect. Experiential activity has to go the extra mile, making it worthwhile to move offline and go into store, so this may mean that customers get to play with a product, get additional advice and expertise - something that they can't access ordinarily in an online experience,' says Adam Tregaskis, head of retail at The Market Creative. 'The customer's experience has been transformed with experiential retail to deliver to all the senses.



so you get to see, smell and feel meaning that you can fully appreciate the product and its benefits.'

The Market Creative has been working with Sharps on the design of its Baker Street, London store. The Sharps brand is all about 'Created with You', which highlights the partnership between the shopper and Sharps to transform their bedroom. 'We wanted the showroom to feel like a creative space where shoppers can explore the available designs and ranges that they can choose from, while equally allowing the expertise of Sharps to help them on their journey. The zones within the showroom tell a story and encourage shoppers to touch, explore and take their time in the showroom,' explains Tregaskis.

'It's vital to start not with design or layout but with research and planning. Look at what's going on in the retail world: we usually take clients out on a "Retail Safari" to explore different retail experiences. This is not just about looking at the competition, but viewing out-of-category too for best-in-class examples and identifying their strategies. Once you've thoroughly investigated you can then take your insight and combine it with knowledge of the brand and retail expertise to identify the strongest stories and the most interesting ways of bringing them to life in store. These range from expressing the brand's personality to dramatising specific product benefits. Only then can you move forward into the creative development of the showroom design.' **Rf**

Facing page: The Lush flagship indulges fans in a complete immersive brand experience.

Above, clockwise: At Sun & Sands Sport at The Dubai Mall, Green Room created a sense of community by allowing customers to trial and compete at their favourite sports in store; Powered by Google, The Burberry Booth enabled customers to star in a personalised version of the retailer's festive campaign; For Sharp's Baker Street London showroom, The Market Creative designed different zones that tell a story and encourage shoppers to touch, explore and take their time in the store.

Left: At The Toy Store on London's Oxford Street, Propability created a Nerf Target Practice Range allowing children to play with Nerf blasters and darts for target practice.

