

EXPERIENCE

In-store social media gives retailers an opportunity to engage with and inspire consumers instantaneously. But is it the best way to connect with shoppers? **Mark Faithfull** reports

Lowe's

Agency BBDO illustrated two new fixes for city living – painting a room a light colour to make it look bigger and hanging a bike from the ceiling to save space – in the form of animated window displays in Chelsea, Manhattan, and also broadcast on Periscope.



mobile shopping

It's hardly surprising that many retailers feel tempted to connect with their armed-to-the-mobile-teeth shoppers via social media in their stores as the lines between marketing, content and advertising continue to blur.

A number of UK retailers – including New Look, Burberry and McDonald's – have grasped the virtual baton, but it's US retailers that have led the charge. Nordstrom, Birchbox, JC Penney, Benefit and Lowe's are among those who have tried out social media platforms in store to engage with shoppers and drive sales, particularly over the past 12 months as social media projects have ramped up.

Examples are numerous and cross the major platforms. US department store chain Nordstrom highlighted its summer Sale with a 55ft, roof-mounted 3D installation showing a Leith leopard-print dress as part of a large-scale Instagram post, shared live on all of its social channels. Meanwhile, Lowe's 'Fix In Six' consisted of six-second home-improvement

tutorials adapted as animated window displays to generate buzz about its new, smaller-format store in Manhattan's Chelsea district.

Lowe vice-president of concept and market development Jonathan Luster describes the initiative as the company's "first store designed with omnichannel. You don't need the space when you've got these other capabilities. It makes the shopping experience so much simpler and so much easier."

Design company Portland's managing director, Ibrahim Ibrahim, stresses that social media is a "tactical question" at present but says that while it is seen as part of experiential retailing, it may well migrate to being used for one-click buying and one-to-one dialogue with brands.

"For example, I could see something like Facebook Messenger being hived off and used as a platform for daily interaction with consumers," he says. "For retail this is especially important because of the geo-locational aspect of Messenger, so beyond

communication this may be a platform for personal delivery not to your home or office but to wherever you are."

Online beauty subscription retailer Birchbox has been one of the pioneers of using live video. The retailer, which has a store and concession presence, has also been bullish as an early adopter of Facebook's Live video feature. Benefit, meanwhile, has used the same service to create an irreverent advisory service on makeup. The 'Topsy Tricks' live videos are timed to go out as viewers prepare for a night out.

"The most important part about that tool is that people can ask you questions. It's the feedback loop, it's the live Q&A," says Birchbox consultant and former director of social marketing and content strategy Rachel Jo Silver. "You can do a live Q&A to market anything. If you're an expert, people want to talk to you."

"Social media is part of the everyday and increasingly a part of consumer journeys," says Dalziel & Pow group marketing director David



Nordstrom

US department store retailer Nordstrom used a store roof for a huge Instagram campaign to flag up its Sale, which it broadcast across other social media channels along with a time-lapse video filmed by drones.



Wright. “We have all seen the research on millennials and Gen Z, and it’s important to reference these generations’ influence on others – that social media is key for personal expression, peer approval, inspiration, brand advocacy, information, the list goes on.”

A memorable experience

However, Wright questions whether retail should be “forcing interaction” in store: “Participation and immersion is becoming increasingly ingrained in the identities of consumers. The challenge for stores today is not only to sell products but also to become spaces for learning, inspiration and socialising,” he says. “Retailers should be thinking about how they can offer more memorable experiences, which by their very nature will be shared and ‘talked about’ on social media. Be it a yoga class at Lululemon, a DJ tutorial at O2 or

the pure theatre of Primark Madrid; a spectacle in the centre of the store that customers cannot help but share.”

Social media platform Pinterest is working with Oracle’s Data Cloud to prove that promoted pins – which companies pay Pinterest to display – are translating to in-store purchases and driving strong incremental in-store sales per impression.

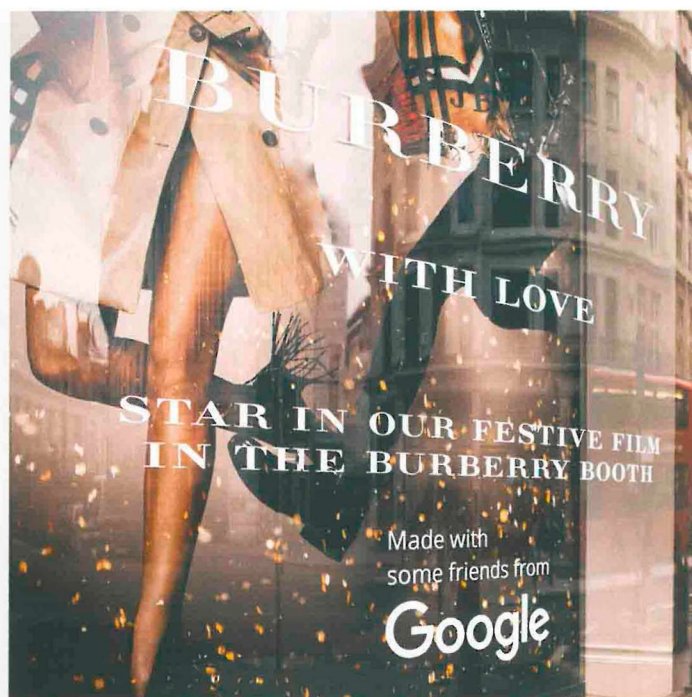
And ahead of Mother’s Day in the US, department store chain JC Penney flipped that idea with a campaign designed to get more ‘millennial moms’ shopping at JC Penney.

It set up a series of life-size Pinterest digital boards at 10 malls across Texas to showcase different products and styles to encourage consumers to visit the store. Nordstrom also tracks Pinterest to identify trending products and then uses that data to promote those products in its stores.

British brands have also been experimenting with customer interaction. Earlier this year Burberry used Snapcode to allow in-store shoppers to scan a barcode to unlock content from Burberry’s campaign for male fragrance Mr Burberry. Burberry ran the content on Snapchat’s Discover channel, having previously used Snapchat to unveil its spring/summer 2016 collection on the mobile app the day before its official runway show at London Fashion Week.

Burberry also opened ‘The Burberry Booth’ at its Regent Street flagship in the run-up to Christmas. Powered by Google, using real-time video-stitching technology, it 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

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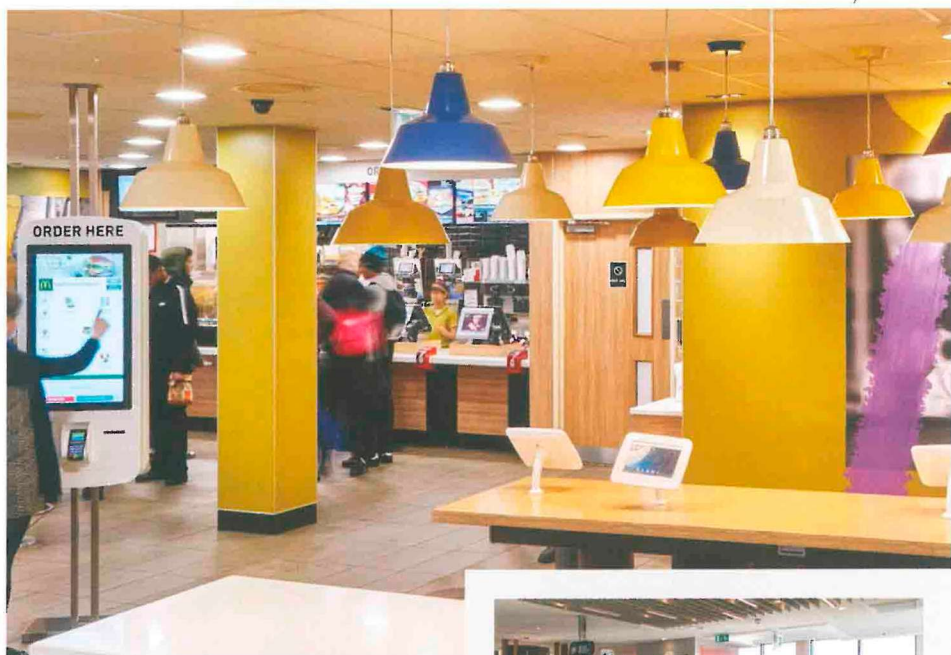
Burberry

Upscale fashion retailer Burberry has used a number of social media channels for in-store and out-of-home campaigns, including a collaboration with Google as part of its Christmas advertising.

footage within the film itself. Once their bespoke film had been created, customers immediately received a shareable copy via YouTube, Twitter or email. "Bringing interaction in store and enabling sharing and social transparency across more and more media is the first part in creating dedicated digital interfaces for stores," says Ibrahim. "It's about identifying the social aspects."

Like Burberry, fast-food operator McDonald's has been using social media for some time. It is rolling out Samsung Galaxy tablets across its UK restaurants as part of its 'Experience of the Future', following successful trials with enterprise mobility management specialist SOTI last year. The tablets enable people to play games, use social media or browse the web in the restaurants.

McDonald's UK head of IT restaurant solutions and service Doug Baker says: "Having listened to our customers, we know that technology plays a big part in all walks of life and being able to access sites when out and about is something they look for. As a result of this, we have installed tablets in over 450 of our restaurants since they were first introduced in June 2014. Customer user experience is extremely positive and we know that this is responsible for driving repeat visits as the digital transformations are enhancing our customer journey, offering greater choice, comfort and service."



McDonald's

Aylesford is one of the latest of more than 450 McDonald's branches to be fitted with tablets. This follows successful trials of in-store technology last year.

