

The broad business case for pop-up shops

 By Lauren Hartzenberg 9 Jun 2017

The concept of pop-up retail has soared in popularity over the last number of years. Done right, these temporary retail spaces can offer smaller companies a platform to test the market without hefty investment, solve the tangential disconnect between online stores and their customers, and regenerate the face of larger, more established brands.



Janine Johnston

A big believer in the potential of pop-ups is Janine Johnston, co-founder of PopUp Shop Shop, which as you may have guessed, acts as a one-stop shop for pop-ups. As a niche local service provider, PopUp Shop Shop connects clients to properties in shopping centres, 'high street' locations and other interesting spaces – like galleries and rooftops – for short term rentals and offers a full suite of services to make popping up a breeze.

Here, Johnston provides a checklist to ensure you pop up effectively, and explains the broad business relevance of pop-ups and how they can act as a valuable reality check for brands.

■ ***Describe how the PopUp Shop Shop came about and the services it offers.***

A couple of years ago, as a consultant, I received a client brief to set up a pop-up shop. With a small team, we took on a couple of near-impossible challenges, like committing to setting up the store in just three days, curating the range of merchandise from a handful of designers and managing staffing for the client. Things felt even more complicated by having to deal with standard commercial leasing terms for the first time. But, the popup was a success. Our clients extended their stay with a couple of months, and the shopping centre had an interesting concept store for its shoppers that paid the rent while the centre management tied up a long-term lease for the space.

Soon thereafter, PopUp Shop Shop's co-founders met by chance in another meeting and we discovered our shared interest in promoting pop-ups in South Africa and that as a team, we have the perfect complement of skills to offer a one-stop pop-up shop.

PopUp Shop Shop connects clients to vacant spaces in shopping centres and in 'high street' locations for short term rentals. We offer a range of services with incredible partners – from setting up the shop with basic infrastructure to temporary staffing and custom pop-up kit design. PopUp Shop Shop has also developed a range of easy to assemble, modular furniture and display solutions available for hire.

■ ***What are the main concerns and misconceptions that brands have regarding pop-ups?***

- “Retail isn’t my usual business, we don’t have the infrastructure to run a popup.” PopUp Shop Shop’s got you covered. Because we’ve gone through it a couple of times, with a range of clients, we’ve managed to put together a full-service package that makes it easy and affordable for anyone to pop-up.
- “Pop-ups happen quickly.” They do, in a way, (and we’ve had some pretty tight time briefs) but you have to be prepared pop-up to get the most value out of it. Often, the perfect spots for pop-ups become available very quickly, and clients have to be fast at decision-making to secure the location. By that stage, our clients should have thought through their pop-up objectives and goals and should be just about ready to give operations teams the green light on the practical aspects of the pop-up.



the.scene's pop-up shop in Long Street, Cape Town.

▣ ***How are pop-ups beneficial to businesses in general, and SMEs and large retail brands respectively?***

Across the board, pop-ups enable face to face interaction with the market and direct feedback to new products, services or concepts. Pop-up stores offer big and small businesses a ‘reality check’, a chance to put an idea out there and see how the market responds.

For small businesses, pop-ups are a way to avoid long-term leases until you’re really ready. By popping up in different locations, startups have the opportunity to test different markets and types of venues before making the final decision, and full investment. In these times of the lean business model being the only real way to start a new business, pop-ups can allow you to ‘fail fast and succeed faster’.

Big brands and retailers use pop-ups to move distressed stock by doing pop-up clearance sales that will not interfere with their new season lines in stores. Big brand pop-ups are also ideal testbeds for new ideas or business directions. By presenting curated selections, in refreshing ways and in unexpected spaces, brands are managing to connect with customers, especially the youth market.

▣ ***Do pop-ups work better for certain categories of retailers more than others?***

We seem to get most of our requests from fashion retailers. I think this is because it's easier to imagine popping up a clothing store and because pop-ups were pioneered by fashion brands such as Levi’s and Comme des Garçons.

Pop-ups, however, are relevant to all kinds of business.

Recently, Amazon Web Services popped up a hybrid learning hub and co-working space in San Francisco and New York. They encouraged people to come and hang out in their space and meet their technology product experts for training. Their objective was to get close to the communities that use their services, and in this way to keep encouraging innovation based on real-time customer feedback.

These pop-ups follow hot on the heels of Amazon's pop-up bookstores and electronic stores. You really have to take a moment to think about the fact that the world's biggest online retailer has positioned pop-ups as a key growth strategy...

We really do agree that e-commerce businesses can benefit greatly from pop-ups, giving customers tangible engagement with products and the retailer before making purchases.



Kanye West's Life of Pablo pop-up in Cape Town.

▣ ***What are the biggest challenges in setting up pop-ups?***

Sometimes, it can be a whole lot of hurry up and wait in this business. Perfect locations become available very quickly and you have to be ready to grab the opportunity if you really want it. Great locations do not remain available for a very long time.

▣ ***What, in your opinion, are the most important elements of an effective pop-up shop?***

- A clear objective that you'd like to achieve by popping up. Are you popping up to drive sales, to build a brand or to test the market? Your popup strategy should align to your goals.
- Good store design and lighting. Your store should be inviting and engaging, even though you're only there for a short while. It's good to include 'pop-up' in your visual branding, as it sends the message that you're offering a window of opportunity to customers. Your pop-up is an extension of your brand, so even though you're just doing a clearance sale, it's important to maintain quality.
- A supporting communication campaign. You've got to let your network know that you're popping up, and encourage people to pop in to your pop-up. You could offer an incentive for people who purchase from your pop-up, or communicate the uniqueness of the experience.
- Your merchandise. If it's not good enough, it's not going to sell, no matter how many popups you do.
- Staff. As in all retail, having the right staff on the floor is important, but especially so in a pop-up. Your brand has only a window of opportunity to make an impression, and you want that impression to be good.

Visit [PopUp Shop Shop's website](#) for more info and connect with the brand on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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