

Connecting with customers on the ground is not dead

Online shopping continues to disrupt the traditional retail sector. One only has to look at the decline of the British high streets to know that there is a revolution going on in the way that consumers shop - household names such as Boots, Debenhams and House of Fraser have all been affected by store closures and job losses.



Robert Lockyer, CEO of Delta Global

But there could be light at the end of the tunnel for big brands trying to reconnect with their customers on the ground, according to retail expert Robert Lockyer, CEO of luxury packaging supplier Delta Global.

He points out that while the traditional shopping experience is not completely dead in the water, it needs to diversify dramatically.

Lockyer, whose company provides packaging to the likes of Coach, Ted Baker and Radley, has witnessed many different shipping scenarios on his travels around the world, particularly in commercially progressive countries such as the US and Hong Kong.

"I've seen standard stores suffering due to the ease of e-commerce but I've also witnessed brands creating almost their own in-store eco-system as they have swiftly realised that customers are putting both experience and values first when deciding to make a purchase," he says.

"These days in many cities, customers can expect to walk into a store and see food and drink on offer, live fashion shows and music, as well as an instant personalisation of goods. It all makes for an unforgettable experience.

"It's about creating a combined online and offline concept and curating spaces that enhance the shopping experience and that can offer multi-sensory or interactive elements that suit a buyer's lifestyle."



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Beate Stiehler-Mulder and Mariëtte Frazer 22 Jan 2020



Create a multi-sensory experience

"Brands must create hubs of interest that appeal to sight, sound, smell, taste and touch," explains Lockyer.

Dazzling customers with an artistic interior design makes them want to capture it on their social channels, for instance, while nice scents can instantly associate brands with a feeling – think of beauty and pamper brand Lush. Burberry stopped people in their tracks with live elements such as the world's tallest retail screen, immersive sound facilities and even revolving stages for live catwalk shows or musicians.

The feel of furniture and even the dressing rooms all add to a luxurious experience for a buyer. Cafes and taster samples also instantly make them feel welcome.

Diversify design

Do away with your 'boring' in-house style – customers need to be re-energised, says Lockyer.

“Transform your store into a gallery, think artistically and innovate the way you merchandise by taking your customer on a journey and tell the story of your brand through clever design and customised experiences.”

Just recently, in London St Pancras station, beauty brand Lancome installed a 36ft 'Eiffel Tower' made from 1,500 bottles of its La Vie Est Belle fragrance. Visitors could also have products customised with illustrations and calligraphy in the pop-up shop below.

Shops are increasingly looking to extend the time spent in store by producing multi-purpose outlets. When unveiling their largest ever store, last year Primark introduced pamper booths, cafés, barber shops and even collaborated with other brands such as Disney to theme their space and create Instagrammable areas of focus.



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In-store sustainability

The more mindful shopper wants to see forward-thinking stores pairing old with new, switch and swap possibilities and eye-catching edits to the clothes they already own. With [31 % of US consumers](#) stating that they will pay more for products that have the least negative impact on the environment, it is obvious that shoppers are looking for brands to act on the environmental crisis.

“Customers want brands to help them streamline their wardrobes and offer personalised and high-end pieces for almost every budget,” says Lockyer. “By offering facilities and incentives such as money-back offers at ‘recycling and resale’ stations and clothing care and repair hubs, stores can be one solution to loving your clothes for longer as tired clothing can find a new lease of life and even be customised while you shop.”

Some stores also give the flexibility of ‘try before you buy’, meaning there is no wasted time returning unwanted items which ultimately should reduce the buyer’s carbon footprint.

The luxury sector has seen a surge in designer resale websites such as HEWI London, ThredUp and Designer Exchange where people can purchase second-hand or unwanted goods at a lower price.

Physical stores are adapting to this notion, with Selfridges pairing with Vestiaire Collective to open a pre-owned section to its store on Oxford Street in London and John Lewis trialling money-back vouchers on returned goods in 2019.



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Embrace digitalised functionality

Cashier-less checkouts, mobile grab-and-go systems and personalised machinery are big news for the future. Using technology such as quick embroidery and print devices means shops can tailor garments in a matter of minutes – faster than any online service.

While online may be the competition for in-store experiences, digital advancement will actually help improve shopping

facilities and ease of purchase.

Influencers love filming fashion hauls and 'style and accessorise' stories on Instagram while they shop.

Noting that influencers are attracted to experiential and creative spaces to showcase on their feeds, Lockyer says: "Social media icons will create content and brand awareness for you, so take advantage of this. I've seen smart mirrors in dressing rooms which can share imagery and video straight to social media and even interactive store windows that feature live catwalks."



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Communication and personalisation

The more personalised the shopping experience, the more valued the customer feels. For example, Marks and Spencer has implemented a 'human' element to its promotional periods where a free personal stylist is gifted straight to a customer's mobile phone in order to curate a collection of outfits to suit their style and shape.

Facial recognition technology will change the way people buy make-up – the future will see us viewing a range of eyeshadow colours directly onto an image of our face, without us having to test them onto our skin first, for example.

"Brands need to think digitally, such as implementing interactive and scannable QR codes on clothes railings which will connect the customer to an app or webpage that tells you what to pair with the item you've selected in order to cross-sell."



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Packaging continues the brand journey

"The bag that you carry as you exit the shop, on the bus or tube and through your front door needs to be as exciting as the item inside," says Lockyer.

Consider how many of us show off our new purchases to friends and family. Making packaging part of that moment is the key to brand awareness and selling.

Increasingly, the use of plastic bags – which once dominated the in-store industry – is coming to an end, with paper and reusable solutions taking the retail trade by storm. But many brands still haven't cottoned on to the idea, even though more than one-third of purchasing decisions are made by the look and feel of packaging.

Nowadays, social media influencers also use distinctive and beautifully designed packaging as props to style their Instagram photos. Brands will start to make the most of this to expose themselves to a much wider audience.

"Consumers are looking to feel exclusive, so your direction and designs need to be refocused regularly," concludes Lockyer. "Think beyond the customer's expectations and make it happen!"

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