

The enjoyment of in-store shopping is a culture we must not forget

Before the pandemic hit, we were already inching closer to the death of the High Street. But with lockdown restrictions and now, new COVID containment measures in place, its demise seems that much more daunting.

“Consumer sentiments have well and truly changed,” warns Robert Lockyer, CEO and founder of [Delta Global](#), a packaging provider for luxury fashion and beauty retailers. “But whilst presented with a safer, more convenient online alternative, retailers must ensure that the valuable aspects of the in-store shopping experience are not forgotten.”

Any sceptics of the in-store event just need to look at the news on retail recovery, with many brands experiencing [spikes in sales](#) in June, as widespread store closures came to an end. Of course, much of this revenue was generated online, £3 out of every £10 in fact, but Robert believes that the pent-up demand from those who still value the physical phenomena should not be ignored.

“For these individuals, the in-store experience has never been more important and brands need to provide greater incentives for them to visit with so many measures in place, risks involved and alternatives available.

“Of course, safety should be every retailer’s number one priority and, once that’s taken care of, the focus should turn to the service offering, as gone are the days where access to stock is enough to lure consumers in.”

Robert explains how retailers can add value to their in-store offering, which caters to adapting customer needs but also keeps the enjoyment of the physical experience alive.

Unmask safety measures

“Although certain measures, such as face coverings, hand sanitisation stations and social distancing are legal requirements, retailers should be going above and beyond to ensure rules are followed. This begins with clear and effective communication.

“There’s no doubt that the measures in place have changed the experience. For many, careful deliberation now goes into any shopping trip but awareness of how the retailer is protecting them will certainly help ease concerns and provide greater reassurance.

“Whether this is done with in-store signage, social media updates, e-shots or messages on the brand’s website, communication should be consistent, comforting and clear at all times. In a sense, this is a given in the current climate and has now become expected of retailers. If not being done, other in-store incentives will likely be ineffective.”

Omnichannel offers

“Shopping restrictions during the peak of the virus forced more and more shoppers online. Although a first for many, online is on track to becoming the new normal, with some reluctant to going back having benefited from what digital has to offer.

“Despite these benefits though, the High Street experience offers things that online can’t. For instance, trying on items of clothing, accessories or shoes before committing to a purchase can only be done in-store.

“The alternative option would involve ordering multiple items in various sizes to your door and

then being faced with the chore of returning those you don't want. In luxury fashion, price tags make it much more difficult to convince consumers to part with their money before they are certain they like an item. And even more inconvenient is the fact that, if they decide they don't and want to return it, they then have to wait a week or so before the money is deposited back into their account.

"As well as inconveniencing the customer, the environmental damage caused by doubled delivery journeys, larger packaging requirements and excess stock, derails any sustainability efforts the retailer is making.

"In this case, the in-store shopping experience triumphs the online one and many luxury brands have invested heavily in creating an unmatched physical service for that exact reason.

"But, as the pandemic uncovered the shortcomings of physical retail, there is a need for these brands to adopt omnichannel approaches that will not only introduce greater flexibility but also future-proof the business by allowing them to benefit from the best of both worlds.

"For instance, exclusive in-store events can be advertised digitally or consumers can be encouraged to bring back the empty packaging of items they've ordered online in return for discounts and money-off vouchers.

"Luxury department store, [Nordstrom](#), has taken this one step further with their 'no-product' stores in the States. Nordstrom Locals, as they are known, are instead service stations whereby shoppers can pick up online orders, make returns or get items tailored.

"We've seen a similar move from designer jewellery brand, [Tiffany's](#), who have opened up a café in Harrods. Ultimately, these brands are expanding their service offerings in the physical realm, aware of the fact that their products are accessible online, but the experiential currency remains just as valuable.

"And, as such, concept stores could well be the saviour of the High Street. But to get it right you must understand customer needs, rather than simply following trends. So, whilst store closures continue, there appears to be an opportunity for those resilient enough to innovate their offering and tap into a sizeable market that is being forgotten."