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THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

In-Store Design Reinventions Transform Retailers' Fortunes



Amid fears of a brick-and-mortar decline and the push for customer attention and increased sales, many retailers are directing their design efforts into shaping the look and feel of online platforms to mitigate those concerns. But the smartest brands recognize that it's a mistake to neglect the physical shopping environment. After all, more than 85 percent of total U.S. retail sales dollars were spent in person, even throughout the pandemic. (Read more about this statistic from the U.S. Department of Commerce at bit.ly/2TDlyH9.) In fact, the most agile and successful retailers are investing in fresh in-person experiences that can attract new customers, enhance loyalty and return rates, and boost in-store sales while multiplying their online profits, too.

Through bold transformations of

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materials, environmental graphics, and the introduction of radical yet logical store layouts and concepts, design teams can help large chains and boutiques reinvent how customers experience brick-and-mortar retail for encounters that outshine what they'd experience elsewhere, in-store as well as on the Internet.

A Smart IRL Presence that Boosts URL Profits

Many direct-to-consumer e-commerce brands have found that a physical presence helps drive online sales by enhancing customer engagement. Temporary pop-up trials are a common first step, and their success can lead to a permanent storefront.

A large space with extensive inventory may not be needed to fill this role and, in fact, a smaller footprint with a sharp, psychographically focused design is often hugely effective.

The men's lifestyle company GentSac, for example, offers a compelling case study. As a customizable subscription service selling pared-down kits of grooming essentials, the brand's value proposition lies in its mixture of high quality and thoughtful curation, streamlining consumers' navigation through a crowded market. GentSac's founders felt that a brick-and-mortar presence would help potential customers better engage with the product, a vision they hoped to translate into a permanent storefront following the success of a pop-up.

To realize this potential, Landini Associates was engaged to transform a tight



By challenging the normal approach to layout and materiality for a value-based fashion storefront, Landini Associates' retail reinvention for Glassons—now being rolled out across the company's entire portfolio of stores—dramatically improved brand perception among customers and mall landlords.

PHOTOS: SHARRIN REES



PHOTOS: ROSS HONEYSETT

GentSac wanted customers to engage directly with the brand and seek advice in-store, try products before they subscribe to the brand's service and buy immediate essentials. Landini Associates worked with GentSac leadership to develop a deep understanding of the brand mission and ethos before designing its store.



PHOTOS: COURTESY PRIMERA

In South Korea, eco-skincare brand Primera's story is told and made physical through the use of natural materials, drawings, photography and in-store herb gardens that juxtapose props of test tubes and scientific apparatus expressing Primera's extensive scientific research.

shopping center space into a 161-square-foot flagship for GentSac, with the goal of allowing customers to engage directly with the brand and seek advice in-store, try products before they subscribe to the brand's service or simply buy immediate essentials. It was critical for the design team to work with GentSac leadership and develop a deep understanding of the brand mission and ethos. The resulting design is thoughtfully minimalist and calming with a material palette of light gray concrete walls offset by simple timber shelves that allow the product to remain the focus.

Wall-mounted wooden hooks display the range of curated product "sacs," and a corner testing station offers an opportunity to try products. The storefront features black steel and glass sliding doors that allow the entire store to open, creating an inviting atmosphere that reflects the brand personality and attracts customers inside. More a gallery space than a skincare store, the GentSac space has generated significant foot and online traffic for the

brand and, more to the point, its founders have seen a nearly 60 percent online sales increase since opening.

Designers Reinvent Normal to Shift Consumer Perceptions

In the same way that a creative and brand-responsive design can help connect the dots between in-person experiences and online sales, this design approach can also help retailers reinvent themselves and radically shift public perception in a positive way. Consider Landini Associates' recent redesign for Glassons, a New Zealand-based fashion retailer facing global competition from stores, such as H&M and Zara. The project brief from Glassons leadership to Landini Associates was to better present the in-store product, making collections more intelligible and heightening customers' perceived quality of the great-value merchandise.

As with GentSac, Landini Associates' design solution involved a deliberate, unconventional approach to materiality and

layout. In this instance, the design team understood that reinventing the brand meant reinventing expectations of what a clothes-shopping experience should look and feel like. Taking inspiration from the layout of supermarket aisles, the bold design removes all products from the walls and places them in wardrobe-like display units that coherently frame individual collections and allow them to be easily styled together—a marked contrast to the usual practice of cramming in as much product as possible into a physically and visually crowded interior environment.

The Glassons material palette includes light oak, concrete and mirrors, resulting in a fresh interior space that feels expansive and urban, along with other important benefits. In fact, Landini Associates found that presenting merchandise in this seemingly pared-down way created space for 50 percent more product on the sales floor. Another smart design solution that contributes to the clean aesthetic and enhances the sense of spaciousness is setting mirror-concealed stock rooms around the perimeter of the store. From a shopper's perspective, the result is an experience that is at the same time more chic and more intimate.

By challenging the normal approach to layout and materiality for a value-based fashion storefront, Landini Associates' retail reinvention for Glassons—now being rolled out across the company's entire portfolio of stores—dramatically improved brand perception and not just among customers. Leadership reports that mall landlords who once turned Glassons away are now seeking out the brand, offering prime high-traffic locations within their shopping centers.

Telling Brand Stories Through Design

Storytelling is another powerful method for defining and selling a brand, and design teams can help retailers reimagine their in-store experience to tell their story and distinguish themselves from the competition. Doing so requires a holistic approach in which every element of the physical space—from signage to layout and store architecture—becomes a narrative tool.

When the popular skincare brand Burt's Bees planned for an expansion in Asia,



Landini Associates reinvented its retail format for an approachable yet premium position emphasizing sustainability and a philosophy that everything should be for the greater good. From a design perspective, this meant storefront spaces that express brand principles: a simple, frugal world that is at one with nature. Inside the store, a large image of founder Burt Shavitz in nature with his bees sets the brand's story, along with an ever-popular collection of products from the 1980s original range.

Natural materials capture the brand's essence and golden lighting recreates the magic of being inside a beehive, inviting warmth and encouraging customers to dwell longer in-store, discovering Burt's Bees full offerings. Adding to the in-store experience is the dramatic honey wall, which is made of replicated honey jars, for an inviting and friendly atmosphere that aligns with the brand personality, defined as passionate and cheerful. In tandem with the interiors, Landini Associates redesigned the brand's graphics and communications: Signage, ticketing and information graphics are often embossed with a playful, iconic bee, all of which create a consistent brand message that reinforces the position of Burt's Bees as a standout choice in a crowded market.

Similarly, for the South Korean eco-skincare brand Primera, Landini Associates reinvented the retail flagship store in Myeong-dong, Seoul, with a modern storytelling of the brand's highly successful "Botanist Atelier" concept. This concept—a

Inside Burt's Bees' Asia stores, a large image of founder Burt Shavitz in nature with his bees sets the brand's story, along with an ever-popular collection of products from the 1980s original range.

thematic combination of nature and science—was translated into the redesigned space with a newly refined experience that appeals to an increasingly sophisticated audience. The design approach enables a narrative celebrating the science behind the natural efficacy of Primera's products. The brand's story is told and made physical through the use of natural materials, drawings, photography and in-store herb gardens that juxtapose props of test tubes and scientific apparatus expressing Primera's extensive scientific research. This kind of comprehensive and narrative-driven design approach helps retailers generate a coherent language for customers, enabling them to feel the brand identity through the physical environment.

Ultimately, finding the best solution for a retail client depends on the client's attentiveness to customer needs and an understanding of how current in-store models are enhancing or detracting from the consumer experience. For creative and forward-thinking retailers who understand the power of design to impact business, a transformed in-person shopping environment can drive loyalty and sales, both on-the-ground and online. [F](#)