

EXPERIENTIAL SHOPPING

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BRICK-AND-MORTAR IS NOT DEAD: RETAILERS ARE MAKING THE MOST OF THEIR PHYSICAL SPACES, AIMING TO BECOME SITES OF ENTERTAINMENT, CULTURE AND SOCIAL LIFE.



Dior, Photo: Aldo Sperber

Three years ago Eric Kuhne, architect and expert in retail design, wrote an article about how the digital age enhances consumers' need for "civic life". He called on brick-and-mortar to capitalize on the physicality of their spaces, to focus on haptic experiences that e-tail cannot offer, and to aim to become a "third place" away from the home or office where customers can engage in social and cultural, as well as economic activities. So far a number of retailers seem to have taken on his approach.

The newly opened **Dior Flagship** store in Miami is one example: it has a garden terrace with a cafe and several artworks, including a video-wall by Yoram Mevorach Oyoram. Amsterdam's newest hotspot, **X BANK**, combines a store selling contemporary fashion and an exhibition space. The women's floor of **Seibu Shibuya** store in Tokyo, designed by Nendo, is an art experience of its own, reminiscent of a fairground circus.

Instore entertainment is now more engaging than ever. In 2014, the Seoul branch of activewear brand **North Face** offered shoppers an adrenaline-boosting sporting challenge: while they were browsing the latest collection, the floor beneath them slid down, and they were forced to grab on to the walls – that happened to have rock-climb holds attached – and clamber towards the desired items. Last year, the brand came up with a new adventure: while trying on a winter jacket, unsuspecting customers were placed into a sleigh and pulled around the mall by a bunch of Siberian huskies.

Men are a consumer group that is particularly targeted through entertainment. Pampering services are used to attract clients at **Emporium Men** in Baku, with tailor areas for custom advice and a barbershop for the perfect trim. **Frank & Oak** in Toronto also houses a barbershop in addition to hosting regular community events. The newly

refurbished menswear section in London's **Harvey Nichols** offers a communal space for male customers, with TVs screening sports events, refreshments and game consoles.

"Delivering an ownership experience is as important [as offering great product]," says Tammy Smulders, Managing Director at strategic consultancy Havas Luxhub. This holistic approach to retail is vital in the current climate. According to a recent study published by the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), in-store customer conversion rates are still four times higher than those of e-tail; no wonder smart offline retailers strive to make the most of their square meters, not just by filling them with merchandise.