

20 IDEAS WORTH STEALING

Intrigue. Drama. High-tech exploits. Retail today has all the elements of a blockbuster movie — including, when we're lucky, plenty of "loves" and "likes."

Onscreen or off, it takes more effort than ever to create something truly unique. Like filmmakers, retailers are happy to, shall we say, "pay homage" to themes and elements that have been proven to resonate with consumers.

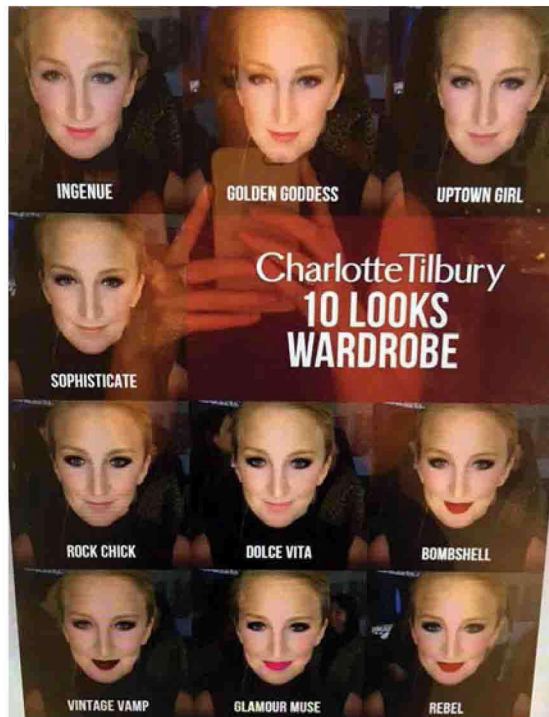
So grab the popcorn and take a seat. It's time for our annual list of 20 ideas worth incorporating into your own storyline.

CREATE SALES AND CONSUMER "MAGIC" WITH AUGMENTED REALITY

Devotees of Charlotte Tilbury — makeup artist to the stars and founder of a rapidly growing eponymous beauty brand — are already well accustomed to "magic." After all, the company's products include Charlotte's Magic Cream, Magic Foundation and Magic Eye Rescue.

Now there's a Magic Mirror. In the Westfield London shopping center flagship store, Tilbury offers shoppers augmented reality mirrors, allowing them to "try" 10 signature looks. Created in conjunction with augmented reality solution and software provider Holition, there's even a button that allows users to see how each look can be updated for night or day.

The ability to experiment with makeup in-store is nothing new; neither are apps that allow, for example, the chance to try on a number of lipstick shades. Here, though, the experience — labeled "in-



credibly genuine and realistic" by *Forbes* — features mapping so precise that shoppers can close an eye, turn the head or move in closer while experimenting with the brand's full range of products.

Charlotte Tilbury still offers individual makeover sessions, during which the actual products are applied. The Magic Mirror, however, can serve as a fun and informative starting point for finding a "look," integrating technology into the in-store experience in a way that's beneficial for sales associates and shoppers alike. — **Fiona Soltes**

SHOP FROM NEW SCREENS

Amazon continues to up its game when it comes to one-click ordering. Almost out of laundry detergent? Hit the Amazon Dash Button in the laundry room and Tide is on its way.

Those ideas are quickly becoming mainstream, so Amazon has set its sights on concepts that move one-click from functional to fantasy: Viewers in Japan can stream a new cooking show on Amazon — the multi-hyphenate retailer produced four 40-minute shows initially — and order products featured in the episode. Viewers just fill in a simple form that includes a mailing address; when they're inspired by the cuisine featured on an episode, they can order ingredients to be delivered with one click of the button.

The opportunities extend well beyond a single cooking show. In mid-2016, Amazon also launched a food travelogue featuring Emeril Lagasse, which seems like a perfect extension of the Japanese experiment. With Amazon's other original productions, this tool could be used in multiple ways: Order the latest in post-apocalyptic fashion from an episode of "The Man in the High Castle" or get a new suit from "Bosch."

Of course, the latter has been tried before, with websites like WornonTV.net and ShopYourTV.com making it easy



for consumers to dress like their favorite television stars. Amazon does have a few advantages: It creates its own content; it has access to millions and millions of products; and with its database of trusting subscribers, it serves up the perfect blend of shoppertainment.

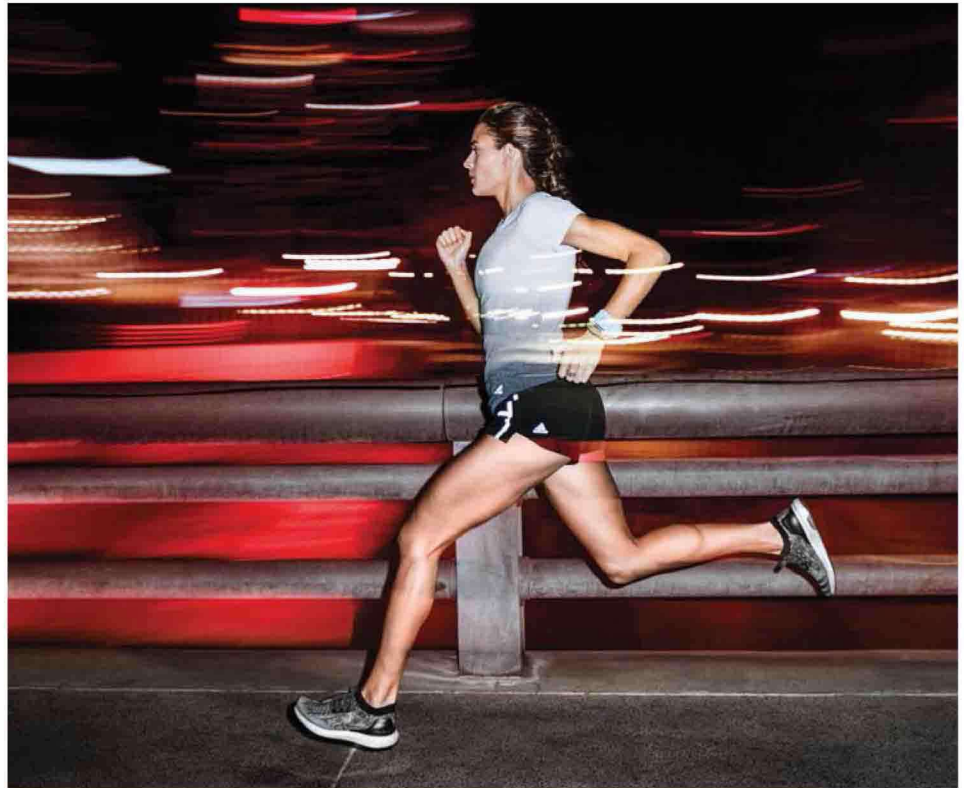
A lot of what Amazon does is worth watching, but its latest strategies to reduce shopper friction could prove transformative. — **Sandy Smith**

KEEP PACE BY CHANGING THE STORE LINEUP

We get it: It's not easy to launch a new store. So why didn't someone think of this sooner? In November, the Mall of America — which continues to set standards for innovative mall ideas — launched Debut, a collection of shops-in-shops that featured nine designer brands: Askov Finlayson, BillyKirk, Fisher + Baker, Laurel Way, Pomegranate Inc., Shepherd of Sweden, Todd Snyder/Champion, West Elm Local and Woolrich.

But here's what got our attention: The brands will rotate every few months, along with the design and feel of the store. So several times a year, MoA essentially adds a new store.

It's not just about keeping things vibrant. This incubator offers a way for mall developers to test the waters on new concepts — or at least new-to-the-area concepts. Will one of the nine have “permanent” legs — and therefore earn a spot in the mall? It's too early to tell, though it's a safe bet that MoA is crunching the data to determine how those shops are performing.



TAKE IT ON THE RUN WITH AUTOMATION

Iconic sports shoe, clothing and accessories brand Adidas is all about speed and performance. So why not apply that to its manufacturing? Adidas, based in Germany, announced last summer that it would open a 74,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility in Atlanta to produce footwear. The Adidas Speedfactory, according to the company, will allow Adidas to “create product more quickly and closer to U.S. consumers.”

That's not all: Incorporating a fresh business model and cutting-edge manufacturing technology will allow Adidas to create products “in extremely high volumes with advanced complexity in color, materials and sizes.”

The production target is 50,000 pairs of running shoes in 2017, with a mid-term goal of half a million pairs for running and other categories. Customization continues to be a key component for today's shoppers, and bringing the manufacturing to Atlanta will allow for closer, faster sourcing and shorter shipping.

The Atlanta plant will be the company's second Speedfactory; the first was in Germany, using intelligent robotic technology, and other facilities are reportedly being planned for different regions. The intent isn't to completely automate the process: Plans call for the Atlanta site to create 160 jobs. But greater efficiency is the goal of any athlete — as well as, apparently, one of the athletic world's leading brands. — **FS.**



Minneapolis-based Askov Finlayson — founded by the family that launched Target — is trying to see if its brand of menswear will succeed beyond Minnesota by appealing to the mall's tourists, and Norwegian slipper maker Shepherd of Sweden opened its first U.S.-based store there.

A similar concept could easily fit into any mall — and prove whether new concepts or new-to-the-area stores are a good fit for the space. — **S.S.**



HELP CONSUMERS SEE THEMSELVES IN THE OFFERINGS

Sure, clothes look nice on a mannequin. But knowing whether that look will translate to us humans is another story. At least, it used to be. Long Tall Sally, a global leader in fashion for tall women, has created a custom mannequin based on the precise proportions of an actual customer.

Why does it matter? Because the typical mannequin stands about 5'9" and wears a size 4 — and the typical Long Tall Sally shopper (or female shopper in general) is neither. The

brand previously special-ordered mannequins for its stores (there are 26 locations globally, with four in the United States) but a recent contest engaged customers and personalized the process. The new 3D-printed mannequin — based on customer Harriet Winters — is six feet tall and wears a U.S. size 10. It even shares the likeness of Winters' face.

It's a tremendous body-positive move; the mannequin offers consumers a more realistic reflection. Take it from the model herself: "I do notice mannequins in-store and I'll always look to get an idea of how a dress hangs or how it will fit," she told the company.

"But I don't find it very helpful if the mannequin isn't representative of how I look ... It makes me feel bad that I won't look as good as the mannequin, but also it makes me think I don't want to shop there as it doesn't feel like they're making clothes that are practical."

Points to Long Tall Sally for listening — and responding to — customer needs. — **FS.**

MARRY BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY GOALS

There's no doubt that retailers can struggle to fill open jobs. The U.S. unemployment rate dropped below 5 percent last year at a time when retail hiring was up. In July, government data showed there were more retail jobs unfilled than in 2015, and yet that month unemployment among young people topped 20 percent for African-

Americans and 11 percent for Hispanics.

A job fair held in Chicago aimed to change that, bringing together teens who are out of school but not working with companies looking for employees. It's part of a program called 100,000 Opportunities Initiative, an employer-led coalition focused on hiring young people who face systemic barriers to employment and education.

The program is led by philanthropy experts FSG and the Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions. Participants on the retail side include CVS Health, JCPenney, Nordstrom, Walgreens and Wal-Mart; restaurants like Potbelly Sandwich Shop, Chipotle and Taco Bell also are on board.

Perhaps a name change is in order. In mid-2016 — its first year — the program hit its five-year target of hiring 100,000 youth, and subsequently raised its goal to hire 1 million youth by 2021.

"This is not a victory lap; our work is far from complete," Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz said in a statement. "By continuing to expand our coalition and leveraging the power of technology and hiring events, we will invest in solutions that further support the young people of America who are our future workers, customers and citizens."

Lesson: Look for opportunities to improve communities as well as the bottom line. — **S.S.**

SPOTLIGHT SOLAR

Ikea is not one to check off the box of "sustainability" and call its efforts complete. The Swedish retailer continues to forge new paths.

When it came time to open a new store in Memphis, Tenn., the company added a 250,000-square-foot solar array to the building. The 4,424 panels are expected to produce 2 million kilowatt hours



annually for the store — effectively removing 1.4 tons of carbon dioxide annually and generating enough electricity to power 205 homes per year.

While those stats are impressive, the Memphis store also marks Ikea’s 44th solar project in the United States, powering about 90 percent of its U.S. locations. The company has committed to allocating \$2.5 billion to invest in renewable energy through 2020 as part of its energy-independent goal.

Ikea has some 700,000 solar panels around the world and owns about 300 wind turbines, one-third of which are in the U.S.

Energy efficiency is far more than buzzy language for Ikea. And it’s not just a few pictures in a corporate responsibility brochure. For Ikea, it’s a commitment born out of a serious belief that it can do good while minimizing environmental impacts. The company is leading the way — and showing other retailers the benefits. — S.S.

EMPOWER SEASONAL EMPLOYEES TO MASTER THE GAME

Game play is all about mastery — with, perhaps, the joy of a little surprise and delight. Marbles: The Brain Store has put those elements in the hands of its “BrainCoaches” (retail associates) with an in-store app that allows them to make better product recommendations to consumers and show videos of top toys in action.

It was especially helpful for the holidays, allowing seasonal BrainCoaches to quickly get up to speed on the large pool of inventory — and help pick the best gift based on “brain type,” age range and/or price. Marbles, which specializes in educational games and toys, usually takes on some 230 additional employees for the holidays.

The app launched in November following a brief trial period. The initial plan was to pilot the app in limited markets, but it was so well received by store managers that Marbles, well, rolled the dice and released it nationwide.

Marbles prides itself on helping consumers find the right item for every brain, and this level of technology-enhanced customization “contributes to the ul-



time goal of eliminating any possibility of buyers’ remorse — especially around the holidays, when the stakes are higher.” — F.S.

USE CORE VALUES TO BRING TRANSFORMATION

A decade ago, Zappos created its “core values,” 10 principles that would serve as the company’s foundation. These days, those values are being used to transform walls in cities like Baltimore, Los Angeles and Miami.

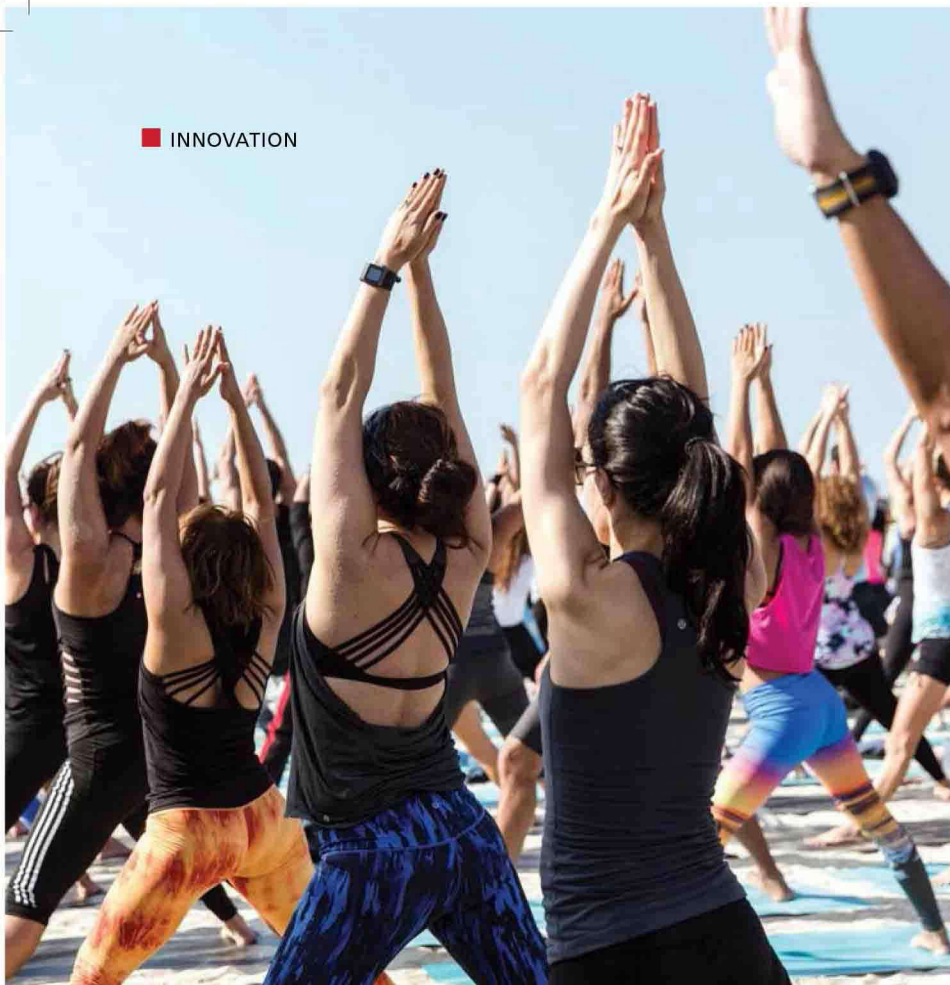


Working with Beautify Earth, Zappos commissioned 10 artists to create murals, each depicting one of the values. The artwork has replaced blank canvases, painted cinderblock and brick walls that don’t contribute anything to the community.

The intent is to help renovate communities with vibrant artwork. It’s all part of Zappos founder Tony Hsieh’s vision to transform the company’s hometown of Las Vegas, a city hit hard by the 2008 economic downturn. The company moved from the suburbs into the downtown area a few years ago, and Hsieh has contributed \$350 million to the Downtown Project, a multi-faceted program to revitalize the area.

While murals and civic projects may not be right for every company, Zappos proves that core principles can — and should — be more than just a few statements tacked upon a bulletin board. — S.S.





KEEP THE INNOVATION — AND COMMUNITY — COMING

Lululemon Athletica does more than help shoppers look the part of athlete; it also helps them experience it. The yoga-inspired athletic apparel company has more than 300 stores around the world, and most offer yoga classes in-store or in public spaces, running clubs and other happenings. Classes might include barre, boxing, Zumba, Pilates and high-intensity interval training.

Over the years, the concept has worked well for creating community — and has inspired other brands to follow suit. But before those other brands have had a chance to catch up, Lululemon is making waves once again: The Flatiron flagship store, which opened in Fall 2015 in the heart of Manhattan, includes a large underground area dubbed “Hub Seventeen.” The mid-city retreat includes classes, naturally, but also features works from local artists, a communal table and a refreshment stand for guests.

As if that’s not enough, there’s also a concierge service for products and recommendations for classes, studios and running routes, as well as hemming, tech support and storage for coats, bikes and umbrellas. The overall store design is said to encompass “the connection of people, pursuits and ideas” and is aimed at being “an incubation space to develop innovative projects with the goal of expanding them to Lululemon stores worldwide.” — **FS.**

OFFER A NEW TASTE

Food has long drawn people together. Last April, it did so in an entirely new and delicious way.

Google Translate held a five-night #everyone-speaksfood pop-up event in New York City called Small World, complete with a variety of celebrity chefs representing different cuisines. The only catch for customers who hoped to dine? They had to use Google Translate to order their meals.

The event was conceived by the messaging p eces company, and merged technology, creativity, culture and community to break down barriers. As Mission Chinese Food chef and founder Danny Bowien said in a video capturing the experience, “Food should not be intimidating. It should be a welcoming thing, and I think that that’s what we’re doing here.”

Menus featured numerous languages; guests used their mobile phones to interpret, watching words turn into English on their screens — or hearing their phones speak those languages out loud.

There were added treats, too: One piece of wall art, when seen with Google Translate, “earned” the viewer a glass of wine. “I never wanted to play by



the rules,” Bowien said. “It’s boring.” Anyone desiring to use tech to create or enhance an in-person experience should find plenty to chew on here. — **FS.**

LET THEM TRY IT AT HOME

Not that long ago, being able to buy paint in sample sizes seemed revolutionary. After all, there’s nothing worse than committing to a full gallon of paint and getting it home only to find that it looks different in the light of the room. Nothing worse, that is, except buying a room full of furniture only to find that it doesn’t work in the space.

Greycork aims to take some of the frustration out of furniture buying with its Home Try-Out kit. While it doesn’t include a full-sized sofa, the kit does include fabric swatches and clear cards on which stickers of the furniture can be placed. Squint



just right and a buyer can see how the couch looks in front of that window — before the box arrives.

That’s not the only disruption that Greycork offers. Its furniture arrives in a flat pack and is intended to be assembled in 10 minutes or less — all while lasting 10-15 years. It also is supposedly just as easy to disassemble, making moving easier.

Furniture is one of the largest purchases we make, yet often is among the most frustrating. By removing the headaches, Greycork is proving that even the most traditional purchases might need a bit of a shakeup, especially when it comes to serving Millennials. — **S.S.**

ALIGN BENEFITS WITH CONSUMER VALUES

It’s one thing to offer perks to customers. Providing benefits that are relevant to the individual customer experience is another matter entirely.

Thrive Market, an e-commerce platform providing natural and organic products, begins by offering discounts for its members, including savings of up to 50 percent on products from more than 400 brands.

But there’s more: Thrive Market guarantees that if consumers don’t make the annual \$59.95 fee back in savings over the year, the difference will be credited toward renewal. In addition, for every membership purchased, Thrive Market donates a membership to a student, teacher, veteran or low-income family.

The company also creates mission-minded content that allows consumers to feel the company shares their values. Thrive Market’s mission, after all, is to make healthy choices easy and affordable for all.

That stance didn’t originally appeal to venture capitalists; co-founder and co-CEO Nick Green recently spoke about “rejections all around” to an early Series A. He believes those investors were too



far removed from the middle-America consumers that the company hoped to reach, so it turned to bloggers, influencers and content creators who not only helped raise the funds, but also helped shape the community — and the company — Thrive Market has become. — **F.S.**

HOLD FAST TO THE CLASSICS

Even when the pace is fast and change is exciting, there’s still a lot to be said for “tried and true.” Just ask Hostess: A couple of investment firms bought the brand out of liquidation a few years ago, and by focusing on the long-loved Twinkie — albeit, with some tweaks — Hostess debuted as a newly public company in November (trading on Nasdaq under the “TWNK” symbol).

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, demand was never a problem for Twinkies, Ho-Hos, Ding Dongs and the like. The issues were more about distribution and manufacturing costs. But where there’s a will — and



a sweet tooth — there’s a way. The adjustments included extending the Twinkie’s shelf life (they used to spoil after 26 days, despite urban legends to the contrary) as well as creating a deep-fried version.

“Hostess’s staying power says as much about Americans’ relationship with food as it does about its owners’ strategy,” the paper reported. “People might try to eat healthy most of the time, but they still want to treat themselves. That dichotomy not only fueled sales of kale and quinoa but also led to the cupcake and Cronut and made a taco shell fashioned from a Doritos chip Taco Bell’s best-selling product ever.” — **F.S.**





PUT THE FUN IN FASHION

Amazon may have set the standard for one-click ordering while consuming media, but Ted Baker has added its own twist. The luxury clothing retailer created a short film, tapping Guy Ritchie as executive producer and filmmaking collaborative Crowns & Owls: “Mission Impeccable” follows the leader of a shadowy agency that deploys agents to prevent a couture catastrophe.

The film is totally shoppable; with just a click, product is added to the viewer’s “vault.” The viewer can then visit the vault to select the appropriate sizes before moving on to the cart.

“Mission Impeccable” serves as the underpinning of an omnichannel campaign — viewers can decode classified documents that appear on social channels, department stores will display the film and Ted Baker is deploying Google Voice in its own bricks-and-mortar stores to help shoppers find clues to the film’s mysteries.

It’s a truly omnichannel marketing experience, one that proves that fun can translate into sales while generating data. If Pokémon Go taught us anything, it’s that people want to immerse themselves in experiences. Ted Baker has taken that philosophy and turned it into shoppertainment — it doesn’t take a sleuth to see its potential for success. — 5.5.

GET INNOVATIVE WITH DATA COLLECTION

With more than 50 million drivers using its app each month, Waze is sitting on a data gold mine. Those who use the service passively — simply by driving — provide real-time data on speed, congestion and routing. Those who are more active can report accidents, police or other hazards. That data alone has paid off.

According to the company, Rio de Janeiro used Waze data



to analyze where traffic was heaviest on election days and shifted personnel to accommodate. Boston used the data to determine the streets with the most double-parked vehicles and sent police officers there to write tickets. And it’s easy to see how marketers might use the information, learning just how many drivers pass a certain retailer each day or where traffic tie-ups may affect store visits.

Waze recently began allowing advertisers to solicit a “favorite” status from users in tests. The marketers could then provide select offers to drivers; Dunkin’ Donuts is among the brands that have signed on as a partner.

Waze’s test shows that smart marketers will continue to push for innovative methods that collect data and additional insights to help brands better know their customers. Along with that will be continued demand to do something with that data — and make the insights actionable. — 5.5.



FOCUS ON THE RIGHT FIRST IMPRESSION

When a brand launches, the introduction to its target audience is vital. So when a U.K. online retailer washed ashore in the United States, it took its fashion straight to the target audience, touring college campuses on the east and west coasts, offering a trendy look at back-to-school fashions. Clearly, not your mother’s mall-based fashion show.

Granted, some retailers already have made a splash with the back-to-college crowd, especially in home goods. (Bed Bath & Beyond on-campus pop-up stores, we’re looking at you.) After all, those dorm sheets have to come from somewhere.

Boohoo jumped in by parking a double-decker bus on college campuses and using social media to draw a crowd, with college-themed games to keep them engaged. A \$1,000 shopping spree provided an added incentive.

There are a million ways to introduce a new brand — and most of those ways have been tried. But Boohoo captured our attention with its laser-like focus on its target audience. It went straight to where they were — both on social media and in person — and did so with subtle branding. — S.S.

USE SOCIAL TO GO GLOBAL

Retailers' efforts to expand globally are often two steps forward, one step back. For U.K. retailer AllSaints, social media has helped reduce the backsliding.

AllSaints has expanded with bricks-and-mortar stores, with locations in the United States and Canada, South America, Asia and Eastern Europe, but the fashion retailer's Instagram feed is also helping to drive additional sales. It links to a webpage that mimics the Instagram feed — with one notable exception: All of the photos are hyperlinked to the actual e-commerce site.

It's not quite shopping from Instagram — yet. A number of U.S.-based retailers — like Nordstrom and Target — also have tried to link Instagram posts to their e-commerce stores. All still require a second or third click to get there.

While using social for global reach is certainly a great idea worth stealing, it seems that there's continued opportunity for social media brands to remove the friction of purchasing what we see shared or liked. And that's something worth following. — S.S.

SEEK CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Since its inception in 2009, Uber Technologies has provided more than 2 billion trips. Its latest lift, however, is best seen in Sears' loyalty program. Last fall, the rideshare service announced a partnership with Shop Your Way, a business unit of Sears Holdings.

The collaboration allows both drivers and riders to earn Shop Your Way points on Uber trips (ini-

tially for riders in Chicago and New York City, and drivers in Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City and San Francisco).

In addition, Sears Auto Centers will serve as one of Uber's preferred maintenance providers, offering 50 percent off oil changes and 30 percent back in points on all Sears Auto Center labor. Other Shop Your Way partners include the likes of Starbucks and 1-800-Flowers.com; the program works by allowing shoppers to purchase top brands with points, in addition to receiving special discounts and sales.

Shop Your Way isn't the only direction Uber is headed. In 2016, the company also announced the inclusion of ride-sharing buttons on the mobile-optimized location pages of banks, retailers and restaurants. The company continues to drive innovation — and, potentially, business. As consumers increasingly use mobile devices to research items and businesses before visiting, Uber could help those customers get there in more ways than one. — F.S.



CREATE A NEW CHANNEL

Anyone who's ever traveled has left something important at home, wondered why they packed the items they did — or simply wished they had something else. Retailers on the hotel property can sometimes be of assistance, but oftentimes not.

Last spring, Westfield Corporation answered the call by opening a new shopping channel: the trial of a connected in-suite mirror, allowing guests at London's Sanderson Hotel to search products, video chat with a personal stylist and have items on their doorstep within an hour and a half.

The Virtual Shopping mirror was installed in an executive loft suite in April. Powered by Google Hangouts, the mirror has two screens — one for a live video link-up with the stylist, and the other an advanced search engine.

Westfield, with interests in 35 shopping centers in the United States and the United Kingdom, has developed a reputation for its tech advances; according to its own research, 41 percent of U.K. shoppers would like to use new technologies such as virtual reality headsets to experience how products will look

in their homes. In major cities, the figure is more than 50 percent.

One other thing they've confirmed: Consumers really are shopping everywhere. — F.S.

STORES

