



Review: NRF's Big Show 2017

THIS PAST JANUARY, *VMSD* EDITORS attended the 106th National Retail Federation (NRF) Retail's Big Show, the industry's largest trade show and conference dedicated to innovation in retail, at New York's Javits Center.

Kicking off the show, Kip Tindell, co-founder and chair of The Container Store (Coppell, Texas), sat down with Virgin Group Ltd. (London) founder, venture capitalist and philanthropist Richard Branson for a one-on-one conversation about forging long-term customer loyalty in the show's opening keynote, "Undying Brand Engagement in an Age of Continuous Disruption and Reinvention."

During the Q-and-A session, Branson emphasized the power of continuously refreshing a brand's identity to fuel longevity, as he has done with the dozens of iterations of the company's Virgin brands, but encouraged retailers to stay

true to themselves at the end of the day. "You've got to make sure it enhances the brand," he said. "[Consumers] don't mind people trying and failing," as long as there are no consequences. Branson also urged retailers to take risks, specifically noting his dicey publicity stunts throughout the years that brought worldwide attention to Virgin Group. "Initially, I did it to put the brand on the map, and then I started doing it for the adventure," he said.

Other conference sessions featured reoccurring themes that have proven top-of-mind for retailers in 2017: omnichannel and big data. From strategy-driven sessions with speaker pairings from Levi's and Intel to Kohl's and Recode, among many others, collecting and leveraging data to enhance in-store and online sales was the talk of the conference and expo halls. —*Kaileigh Peyton*