

## ANALYSIS

What will tomorrow's retail look like?  
Suzanne Bearne finds out at  
Farfetch's 'store of the future'

# Retail's not so farfetched future?

**T**hanks to the lightning-quick speed of technology, it's hard to guess what the store of the future will look like.

Retailers whose reputation hangs on their customer service would place their bets on human interaction still being prominent.

But as Amazon Go illustrates, many stores could be revamped and filled with cutting-edge technology to create a seamless journey with fewer staff.

Earlier this month, on the second floor of the architecturally swoon-worthy Design Museum in its new location in Kensington, one retailer showed its hand as to what its future of retail looks like.

Behind a glass door frame emblazoned 'Store of the Future Beta' lay the project that Farfetch, which sells stock from 400-plus boutiques and more than 100 brands worldwide, has invested in for the past two years.

So fevered was Farfetch about the project that the retailer started inviting journalists and industry insiders to the big day last year.

Behind the glass door lay a makeshift store featuring high-end technology and software. Unlike a lot of other tech that retailers have introduced in the past (think photobooths at Karl Lagerfeld stores and a virtual runway at H&M), the aim wasn't to create marketing hype.

Rather it was to serve a purpose and ultimately bridge together the off- and online shopping channels that are currently so separate.

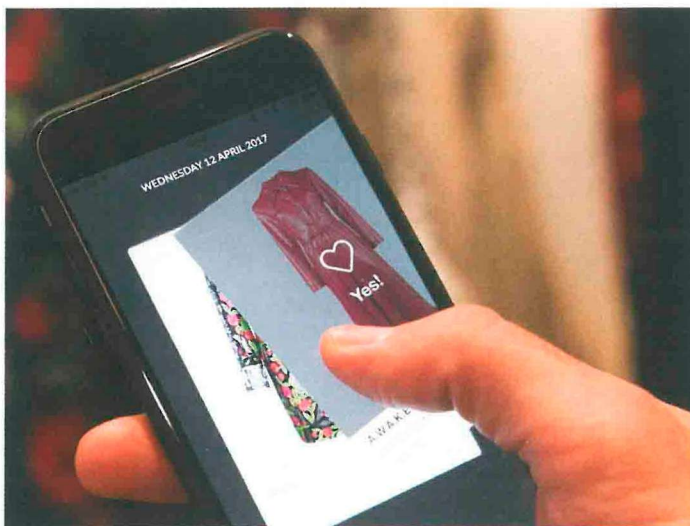
## Checking in

The journey itself is built around each Farfetch customer having their own personal universal log-in.

Customers arriving at the store check in by tapping the app, like they would if they were at the airport or on the Tube, resulting in their details being pinged across to the sales assistant's mobile device.

This shows store staff not only details on who the customer is, but also gives them access to rich data such as their past purchases at the store and across the web platform.

If customers have already saved a wish list of items they'd like to see while at the store, staff will be able to immediately see if they have items in stock. They can also recommend other items based on shopping history.



**“Millennials want a personalised experience, they want sales assistants to be storytellers”**

**Stephanie Phair, Farfetch**

“We have this information online but it's not offline,” explains Gavin Williams, director of product development at Farfetch. “It's bringing online data in-store.”

## Fit for purpose

The next part of the journey is an RFID-enabled clothes rail, which allows for products that customers have picked up from the rack to be saved to the wish list on their app.

Later, customers can browse their app and, in a similar way to Tinder, swipe right

For more on the tech that's impacting retail, head to [Retail-week.com/Technology](http://Retail-week.com/Technology)



"This is how we live now," says Williams. "We want to make sure these interactions are there."

This is echoed by Farfetch chief strategy officer Stephanie Phair. "This really allows for the data around a customer online and offline to be joined up," she says.

"Millennials want a personalised experience, they want sales assistants to be storytellers. Store assistants at the moment spend time checking stock, looking for sizes, but this is all taken care of by tech.

"Store assistants are elevated to be influencers and spend more time talking about the brands. This is amazing for brands as it allows them to be good at what they do."

### Branching out

The next step in the process will see the store officially launch at Browns, the London-based boutique that Farfetch bought in 2015, and at Thom Browne in New York in the autumn.

In the interim, Farfetch will start wooing brands and retailers. "We'll work out what they want, what their needs are," says Phair.

"No two brands will have the same requirement. They can pick and choose... for example, if they want just mobile payment and the universal login."

The pricing of the technology is yet to be confirmed. But Phair reveals that it could become available to retailers not featured on the website. "I think eventually we can market this broadly. Even if they're not on the Farfetch platform, they might become on it."

Analysts were struck by how Farfetch had managed to blend the digital and physical shopping experience.

"What is interesting about the store is not the technology, but how Farfetch plans to use it to create a more joined-up experience," says Petah Marian, senior editor of retail intelligence at WGSN.

She also speculates how the business model might evolve. "The event that they hosted was largely focused on mono-brand luxury players, and I believe the initial focus will be getting them onto the platform.

"[This] will help retailers to gather more data to recognise and service their VIP customers regardless of whether they are shopping in Shanghai or Paris, while also helping Farfetch gather more data to better understand the movements and desires of the luxury consumer."

On the same day, Farfetch unveiled another feat of innovation in its competition against other luxury players, with the launch of F90.

This new fulfilment service enables the delivery and return of Gucci products directly from the luxury store to customers within 90 minutes across 10 cities.

With Net-a-Porter founder Dame Natalie Massenet pulled into the company as co-chair in February, Farfetch founder José Neves might just have his outfit ready for the IPO he's previously mooted.



Smart mirrors display items to match the products customers are trying on

if they want to save or left to remove items from their list.

Farfetch also plans to revamp the changing room experience, again amalgamating the offline and online. Once a customer is assigned to a fitting room, the mirror can display other items that would match with the products they are trying on – and with goods they have previously purchased.

If the customer wants another size while they are in the dressing room, they can touch a button on the screen and a sales assistant will be alerted on their app.

"Fitting room mirrors have been around for a long time, but we felt their weakness is that they don't seem to be connected to anything else," says Williams.

Now, the store of the future allows for them to be tied to the data from the app. They also provide another service: payment.

"Payments can be a real pain," says Williams. "Till boxes generally don't look great."

But with the mirrors themselves, you can review your items and pay via methods such as Apple Pay. The app also allows the customer to add the sales assistant on WhatsApp.