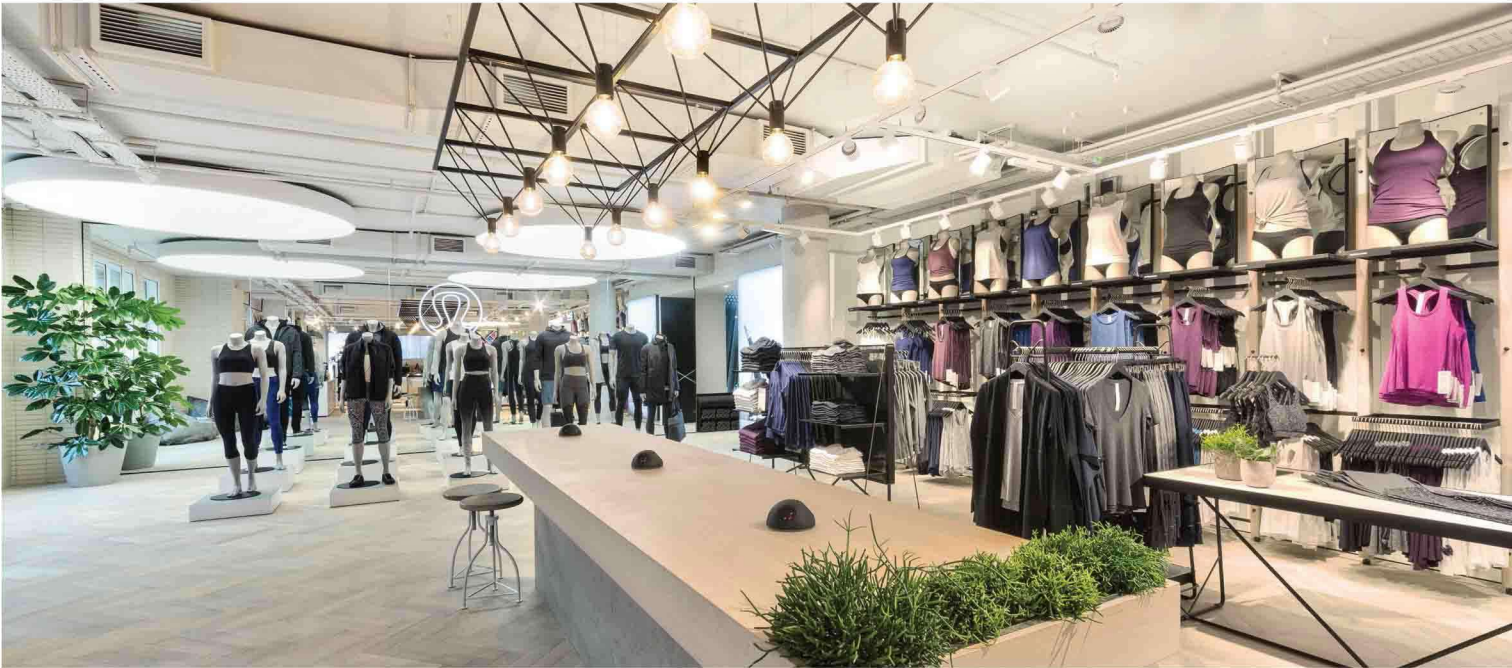


FEMALE OF THE SPECIES



In part one of a two part series, we look at designing stores for the female market.

Text: Lyndsey Dennis

Females have more of an emotional connection in store than men, but how can retailers and designers use this and create the ultimate in-store experience for women? It seems our senses are a key tool, and used alongside memorable experiences will satisfy a woman's connection with a brand.

'Retailers should consider how their shop floors appeal to the whole breadth of their market, remembering that women often shop with emotion and need to feel a connection with the brand - buying a product is much more than a transaction,' says Stuart Geekie, managing director at HMY Group (UK).

He stresses the importance of engaging with all of a customer's senses, introducing theatre in store and exciting pop-up stations. 'Bringing in new technologies is also essential if you are to build a loyal customer base, as it shows that you are market leaders and are committed to giving them the best possible experience. Augmented reality is a particularly useful way to do this with female shoppers, as retailers can create virtual fitting rooms and comparison tools to make their time in store more personalised and enjoyable.'

Geekie stresses the importance of steering clear of out-dated, incorrect stereotypes when it comes to colour: 'Pink is not always the answer and overdoing this in the design of a store can in fact have the opposite effect and deter customers from sticking with you.'

Lara Marrero, firmwide retail practice area leader and senior associate at Gensler, agrees. 'More and more today I think we've done a really good job of breaking down the barriers and made women realise that we work as individuals and not just a group of women. What we've been looking at [at Gensler] is how do you avoid stereotypes whilst shopping?'

Marrero also agrees that women have more of a focus on the emotional connection. 'Women tend to respond better to a full sensory experience than men do. If you're able to engage more than three senses, you tend to get better engagement: they tend to stay longer, they tend to be more engaged in the details.'

Gensler considers everything in the design from what they're looking at to the music playing, smells, touch, beverages and snacks. She believes that the use of digital in-store for women should be used to inform and not replace interaction. She also notes understanding patterns of behaviours of online shoppers. 'How can we take her buying behaviour online and help to inform her store behaviour accordingly?'

Gensler has been looking at utilising user generated content in store. 'If you're going to have images of products, instead of them being really obsessive, well shot products, look at putting user-generated content around the statements so we see how real people use the products. It feels more authentic to the brand and more authentic to the customer.'

At NYX Cosmetics, Gensler introduced Instagram posts in store, showing everyday people using the brand's products, and selfie bars where customers can take photos of themselves trying out products. 'It's women sharing with other women: that real endorsement. I'm just a regular person and you can use this product the same way I'm using this product,' says Marrero. >

Main: lululemon provides service that compliments its products, such as in-store yoga classes.

Using lululemon as an example, Marrero adds: 'Provide service that compliments products and really understand education as well. If you're able to serve her in a way where she feels she is getting time back: so shopping and taking a yoga class in the daytime, you're going to position yourself as something high value to her.'

More often than not, women will want to know the supply chain of products, how they are made and where they come from. Marrero stresses the importance of making the supply chain transparent. 'People, especially mums, want to know where products come from, especially if they're going to be around their babies and children.'

More than 70 per cent of shoppers at Duke of York Square in Chelsea are women. The Square's events programme, which includes a complimentary running club, yoga classes, Wimbledon screenings and the floral festival of Chelsea in Bloom tying into the Chelsea Flower Show, also attracts a largely female audience. 'For us, the focus is always on the holistic experience - attracting customers to the physical enjoyment of shopping, rather than just sitting and ordering online at home,' says Hugh Seaborn, CEO of property management company Cadogan.

Seaborn says they increasingly see consumers mixing and matching lower-priced items with luxury accessories. 'The estate perfectly reflects this modern approach to shopping across the "layers" of luxury - from affordable luxury at Duke of York Square to the couture offering of Sloane Street.'

'For us, it's the same as designing for a guy, or a Millennial, or a silver pound consumer, you have to be able to take your head off and think like them,' says Steve James-Royle, co-founder of retail design agency, The Yard Creative. 'Whether you're a female or male designer, explore their world; understand their routine in the morning, their needs and their emotional connections. Never assume you know them just because you may be one of them. Once you know this, you can design for them.'

James-Royle says there's no doubt that compassion and connection are key for female consumers, but don't wrap them in cotton wool. 'Our strategic work on the Size? female only format or Models Own has shown they are way more knowledgeable than most men when it comes to being an informed consumer. They find the time to research, explore and question each purchase and know what they want,' adds James-Royle.

We'll be exploring the male market in our September issue. **RF**



Kate Nightingale, founder of Style Psychology, shares some interesting research results and how to apply them in store:

- Women use more information and cues to make a decision - make that information more accessible to lower their cognitive effort and increase pleasure, e.g. list of product benefits in POS display.
- Women trust people more than technology - focus on fostering social connections and customer service with great non-verbal skills, e.g. social changing rooms.
- Personal, emotional, expert and positive language is more effective for women - use personal yet knowledgeable experts and accentuate emotional and social benefits of products or brand activities, e.g. TOM'S charitable activity and employees' first-hand experience of it.
- Women have a tendency to stress more - allow women to relax and experience positive emotions to increase shopping satisfaction, e.g. Anthropologie on Regent Street uses biophilic design and burning relaxing candles from its collection.
- Women are immune to obvious sensory cues - bright colours and red sale signs won't always work on women and might have an opposite effect; instead use cues of quality such as wood, dark colours and leather, e.g. Hedonism Wines in Mayfair.
- Women are better at multitasking - just because science proves women are better at multitasking and managing complex situations, doesn't mean they want to: make it simple and intuitive, especially in wayfinding and signage (digital is not necessarily the best option as it adds to the information women need to process).

Top: For Models Own Boxshop at Westfield Stratford City, The Yard Creative designed a user-friendly store that helps shoppers understand how to use the products, as well as how to curate en vogue looks.

Right: For C&A's latest concept across Europe, Gensler was asked to look at a new market sector for the brand called 'casual pretty'.

