

IN STORE

How can retailers make people put down their smartphones and go shopping? Gemma Goldfingle investigates the latest developments in experiential retail



Making more of

IN STORE

Online is increasingly becoming the go-to for shoppers looking for everything from food to fashion. But that doesn't mean the humble shop is redundant.

If retailers are to entice people to put down their mobiles and get off the sofa to visit a store, that store has to be special.

This has contributed to experiential becoming the new buzzword in retail. Shoppers no longer go to stores just to buy stuff, they expect to be entertained.

Adam Shilton, associate director at design firm HMKM, says: "We've been bandying the phrase experiential about for a number of years but now the concept is breaking through to the public psyche.

"People expect to be entertained in store. Online is more commodity driven. You go on Amazon to buy stuff, you're less inclined to have an experience."

"Partners are going to be trained through the lens of experience"

Peter Cross, John Lewis

One retailer that has put experiential retail at the heart of its stores is John Lewis.

The department store chain, which is on track to make half of its sales from online by 2020, seeks to entertain and surprise people in its stores, as demonstrated through its National Treasures campaign this summer.

Celebrating Britain's favourite things, from 99 ice creams to the Queen, the campaign featured a full programme of events ranging from gardening clubs to tea parties.

John Lewis director of customer experience Peter Cross says: "We've

extended the power of the brand into experiences."

The National Treasures theme, which ran from April to August, was clear to see in John Lewis' store windows, which used 2D, cartoon-style animated figures to display the classic British scene of people queuing up for 99s in front of a pier.

The cartoon figures, the work of British illustrator Paul Thurlby, were also put to good use inside John Lewis' stores. They were suspended across the atrium and peppered around various departments.

Cross says John Lewis is taking experiential retail to a new level with the opening of its Oxford store in October.

The retailer intends to run an event on every trading day of the year, and has hired its first-ever brand experience manager for the store.

John Lewis will also send its Oxford store

staff to theatre school before they join, to support its efforts.

"Partners are going to be trained through the lens of experience. Oxford is a whole new level for experiential retail and fully showcases our services," says Cross.

A compelling experience

But how are retailers creating that experience? Lights, sounds and visual merchandising all have a part in creating a compelling in-store experience, but it's technology that is playing an increasingly central role.

Suptasree Roy, associate partner at digital transformation agency TH_NK, says there is an increasing trend of blending the physical and digital in store.

Burberry's Regent Street flagship is a case in point. The store features the world's largest digital screen, from which Burberry streams both promotional content and its catwalk shows live.

Each product has an RFID tag that triggers content about it to appear on the mirrors in the fitting room as the shopper enters.

It's a similar story at fashion e-tailer Farfetch. It also uses RFID at its recently unveiled store of the future, which strives to seamlessly merge physical and digital.

The store's fitting room mirror can display matching items to the clothing being tried on, as well as goods the customer has previously purchased at Farfetch.

If the shopper 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.

The shopper can also pay via the mirror, with methods such as ApplePay offered.

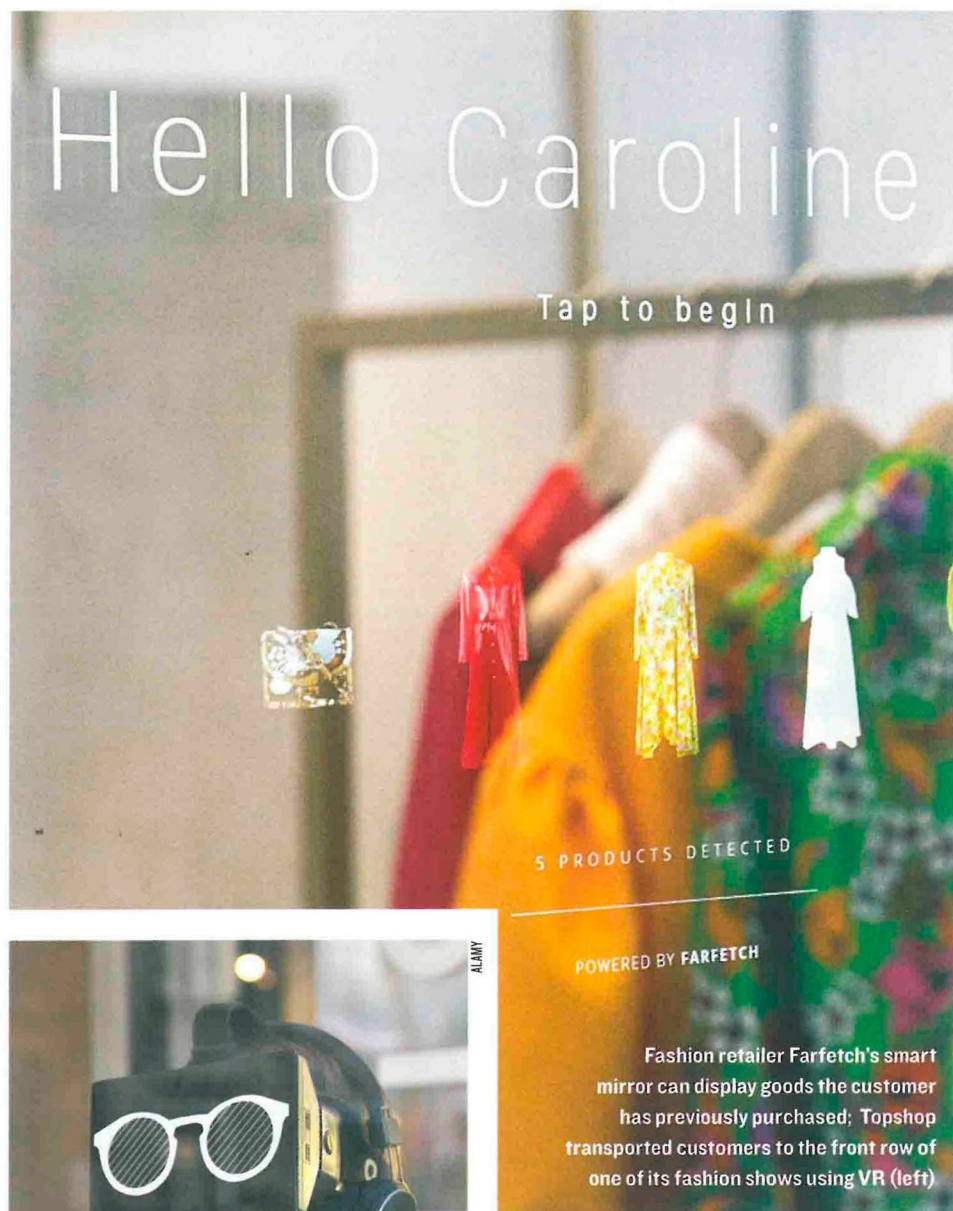
Farfetch's smart mirror shows how technology can help make the shopping experience easier. However, Shilton says technology can also add drama to stores.

HMKM worked on a project with luxury department store Tryano's Abu Dhabi shop in Yas Mall, where it installed an interactive facade.

The store is based on a 'garden of the imagination' concept that changes with the seasons and the screens allow the store exterior to blossom with virtual foliage each day.

At the start of the journey, the customer walks through a grand reception hall with autumnal coloured marbled flooring and timber-clad columns towards the central atrium, which is flooded with natural light.

On the first floor is a winter-inspired beauty space, where shards of icy mirror and crackled glass cling to the walls.



This gives way to the handbag area, which takes its cue from spring, with soft rugs and hues of rose, lilac and lavender. The second floor houses childrenswear, which uses vibrant summertime colours with a fairytale mirrored carousel, crowned

with a mirrored canopy, forming the centrepiece.

The shop offers all manner of personal services, including a bag spa for old purses in need of repair, or new ones in need of a spot of monogramming.

There's also a children's activity centre, a design consultant for nursery decoration advice and a stroller spa, where you can roll up with your pram and have it cleaned.

Using tech in store

Tryano is a good example of technology working hand-in-hand with traditional design elements to enhance and work on a theme.

Shilton says too much technology can be off-putting to some shoppers. "It's got to be at the right level for your customer and brand. Technology should never be intrusive or