



REALITY BEGINS *at Home*

Vera Bradley introduces a line of home goods in a virtual reality storefront.

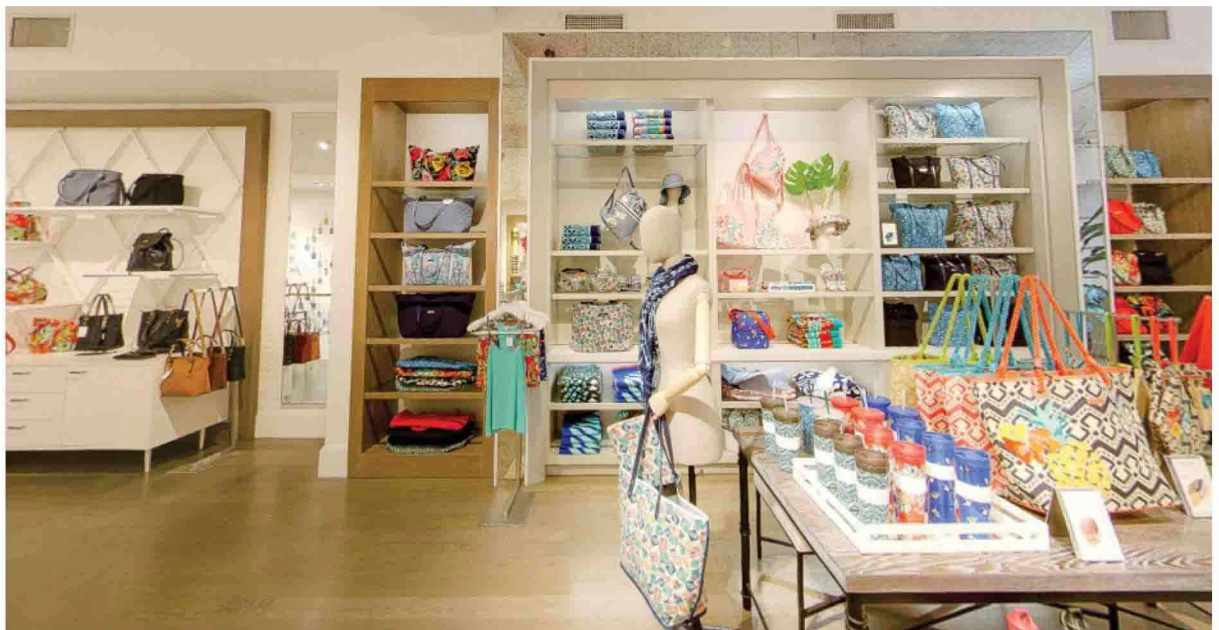
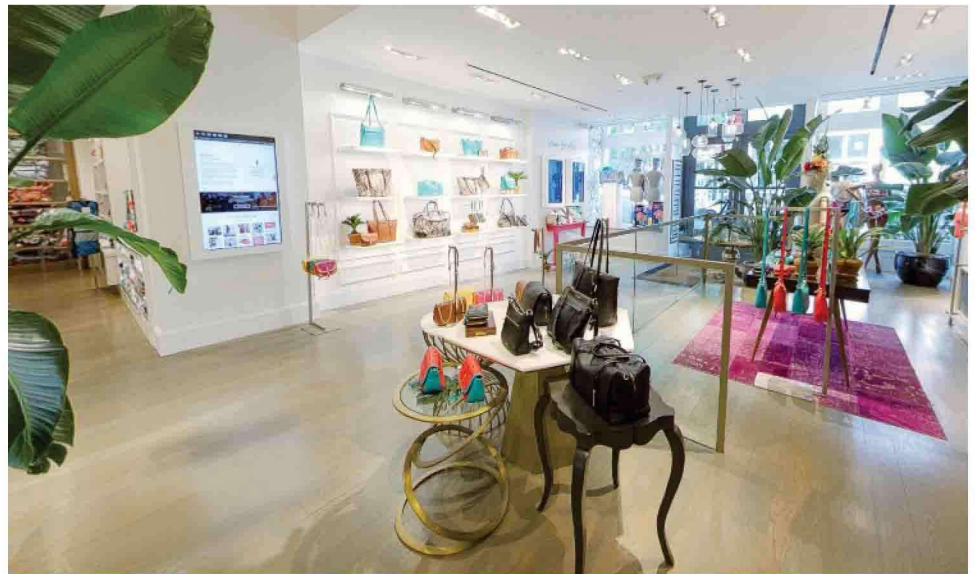
By Eric Feigenbaum, Editorial Advisor/New York Editor

VERA BRADLEY, THE FORT WAYNE, IND.-BASED purveyor of colorful handbags, luggage and accessories, recently launched several new lines of bedding and home goods merchandise. Due to the retailer's already limited store footprint in most locations, it decided to showcase the new collections in an unusual, attention-grabbing way – through virtual reality (VR).

The brand remains excited to extend its product offering while providing customers with a new and innovative way to shop. In keeping with the brand recognition of its patterned handbags, the

bedding collection – including a variety of comforters, quilts, coverlets and pillows – features colorful, intricate prints, created with Vera Bradley's signature cotton fabric.

To introduce the concept, the retailer launched the collection in a VR demonstration at an exclusive press event July 17 at Vera Bradley's SoHo, New York, flagship, which *VMSD* attended. In store, customers engage the branded and merchandised virtual store environment through strategically positioned VR headsets. Once in place, the goggles immerse the shopper in the



The virtual reality environment (shown) mimics Vera Bradley's existing store aesthetic and acts as an extension to its brick-and-mortar presence, immersing customers as they shop for home goods.

PROJECT SUPPLIERS

RETAILER AND DESIGN
Vera Bradley,
Fort Wayne, Ind.

VIRTUAL REALITY
Obsess, New York
Daydream by Google,
Palo Alto, Calif.

world of "Vera Bradley Home." As visitors see merchandise that appeals to them, they can "tag" it using a handheld remote control. At the end of their VR experience, customers receive their shopping list via email, allowing them to complete the transaction online or on the spot with a store associate.

Harry Cunningham, vp, creative services, Vera Bradley, says, "The ability to shop virtually is essentially extending the four walls of the physical store. For us, we see it as a way to share even more product and expand on the brand experience."

The success of Vera Bradley's virtual store was predicated on the close work between the company's creative and IT teams. "Our biggest challenge was the 'newness' of VR," says Cunningham. "It was uncharted territory for us, but our entire team (corporate

and stores) rallied behind this, creating a training program to ensure a successful launch."

He adds, "Customers are loving the experience ... we're actually able to use VR for a dual purpose: selling our Home collection and showing off our SoHo store (remotely)."

The virtual reality program has been deployed in 10 Vera Bradley stores to date. Each participating location has two headsets, ensuring there is no downtime if more than one customer wants to engage with the virtual environment.

With the launch of its virtually merchandised home collection, Vera Bradley has taken a major step forward in blurring the line between digital and physical retail experiences. ▀