

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

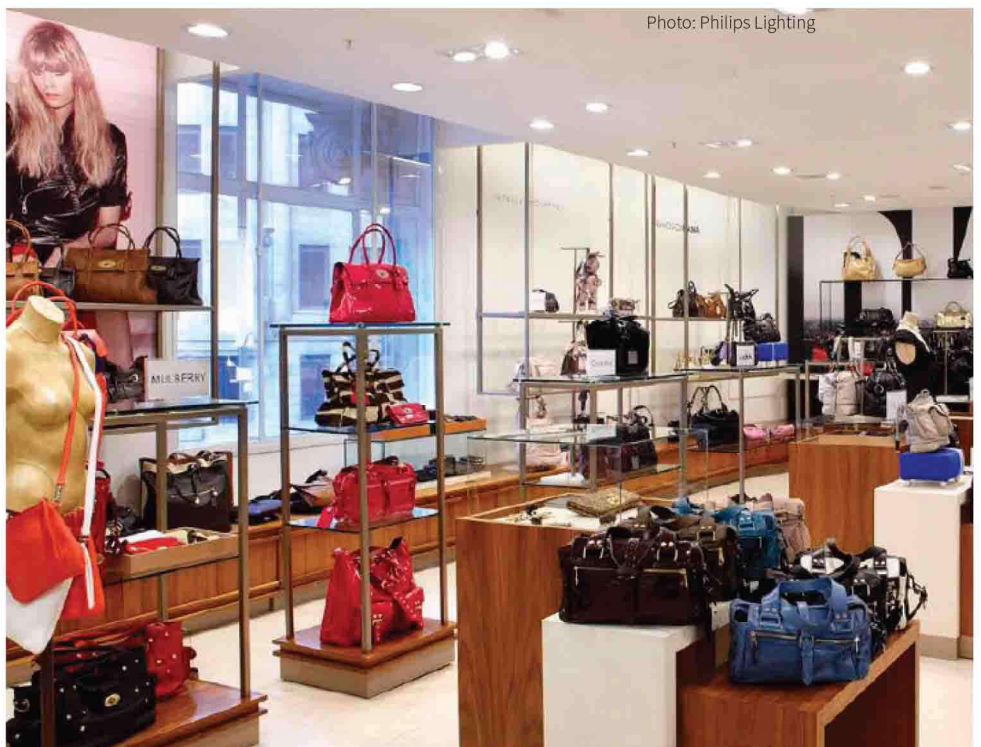
Customer centric organisations are turning their focus on transforming the in-store experience. Here's why...

By Shiv Joshi

The spotlight is now on experience. Advances in digital technology are reshaping customer expectations and behaviour. Digital-first attackers are entering markets with radically new technologies, new applications of existing technologies and fresh ideas, disrupting the ways companies and customers interact, setting a high bar for simplicity, personalization, and interactivity.

To stay in the game and continue to stay relevant to consumers, physical-first retailers too need to up their game on the experience front—it's what customers expect. The round-table discussion at RAI's Kolkata Retail Forum — 'Why In-Store Experience Matters More Than Ever', facilitated by Philips Lighting India brought together representatives of leading brick and mortar retail brands and reputed design professionals to deliberate on the criticality of offering a memorable in-store experience and its impact on business.

The panellists included Raj Banerjee, Marketing & VM, Future Group (Big Bazaar & FBB); Subas Pradhan, CFO, CityLife Retail Pvt Ltd;



► **Lighting at House of Fraser, UK**

JP Agarwal, Agarwal and Agarwal Architects; Rachit Agarwal, Director, Simaaya; Vivek Rathore, Salient Design Studio; Ashish Bahal, Lead – Architect Program & Creative Design Faculty, Philips Lighting Academy, Philips Lighting India Limited; Ritesh Ranjan, Architect, Wow Momo and Sushil Agarwal, VP, Manyavar. The discussion was moderated by Anirudha Banerjee, Vice President

- Supply Chain, Spencer's Retail. It brought to light some key factors that impact in-store customer experience. Excerpts...

LOOK & FEEL

The appearance makes for an important part of customer experience. "Overall store ambience impacts a brand. The look and feel should be bright, ambient



► Philips Roundtable on 'Why In-store Experience Matters More than Ever' at the Kolkata Retail Summit 2017



► Technology can help create a hassle-free checkout experience

and catchy,” said Ritesh Ranjan, architect, Wow Momo.

Illustrating the impact of look and feel on business, Raj Banerjee, Marketing & VM, Future Group (Big Bazaar & FBB) shared Big Bazaar’s experience. “By refurbishing the

look and feel of the store—design, fixtures, visual merchandising—keeping the merchandise mix more or less the same, our sales have jumped by 50% at one of our stores that gets a daily footfall of 10,000,” he said.

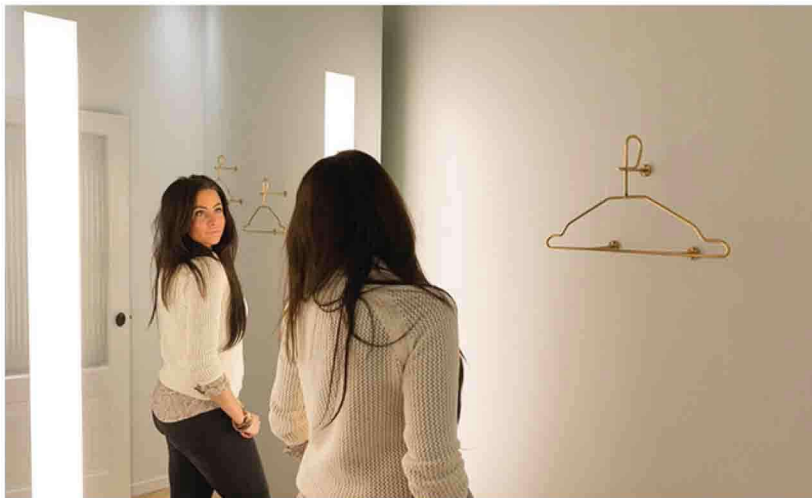
A changeover in layout, lighting, VM, façade of the oldest Big Bazaar store in the country which is at Baguihati, Kolkata that has a floor space of 20,000 sq ft and retail space of just 12,000 sq ft, helped increase revenue by 25% to 30%.

TECHNOLOGY

Convenience of anytime anywhere shopping, high level of personalisation and heavy discounts is what attracts people to e-commerce. E-commerce platforms use a host of technology tools to offer a great user experience.

“However, an online platform cannot give the in-store experience where a person is helping you out. A real-life experience is the differentiator between online and offline shopping,” pointed out Ashish Bahal, Lead – Architect Program & Creative Design Faculty, Philips Lighting Academy, Philips Lighting India Limited.

Photo: Phillips Lighting



▶ Trial rooms are where the actual purchase decisions are made

That is the reason retailers should focus their efforts on improving the in-store experience. According to Sushil Agarwal, VP, Manyavar, technology is what will help retailers give memorable in-store experiences and compete with pure-play online.

“Retailers have to ensure that whatever excites consumers about online is incorporated in stores with the help of technology. We have to combine the best of both to give a seamless phygital experience,” he said. From robotic systems, smart racks and smart carts to endless aisles and beacons, there are various options available for retailers to choose from and customer centric retailers like Apple and Walmart are already using them.

LIGHTING

According to Agarwal, when it comes to getting an edge over online, lighting can be a major

differentiator. “That is something a customer will never get online,” he said. Lighting now plays an active role in in-store experience. It is one of the most powerful and cost-efficient tools that can drastically change store environment with ease. “Lighting is also the lowest hanging fruit when it comes to IoT in a store,” explained Bahal. Today, smart lighting solutions can help a user navigate faster, make interesting unplanned purchases, and improve experience. It can help retailers know their customers better, making the relationship more relevant.

Lighting can be used to add intrigue and dynamism to storefronts helping attract footfall. Animated lighting can be used to create drama at display windows by highlighting mannequins in a set sequence. “Lighting is not static anymore, it is something which, through its dynamism, can create stories,” said Bahal.

CHECK OUTS

“Research shows that billing counters are the make or break point of shopping experience,” shared Anirudha Banerjee, Vice President - Supply Chain, Spencer’s Retail. This makes them an area to work on for improving in-store experience.

“People are willing to spend several hours shopping but are not willing to spend more than 10 minutes at the cash counters. To ensure consumers don’t feel they are getting delayed, we keep them engaged in activities such as magazines etc. Some retailers arrange to keep the accompanying family members entertained to keep area clutter free,” shared Subas Pradhan, CFO, CityLife Retail.

This is an area where technology can help — smart carts and self-checkout counters can be used to bust queues and provide a hassle-free billing experience.

TRIAL ROOMS

The place where the actual decisions about buying or not buying something are made is the trial room, making it one of the priority areas for fashion retailers. Unfortunately, a majority of retailers do not pay much attention to it. “As many as 90% of changing rooms do not have a shelf to put spectacles and the smartphone and no chair to make it easy for the customer to wear their shoes. These are small things but they have a huge impact on experience,” said JP Agarwal of Agarwal and Agarwal Architects.

A Big Bazaar survey about trial rooms revealed interesting facts: consumers want more trial rooms, youth like to take selfies in trial rooms and seek social approval for a look. Based on the research Big Bazaar conducted a pilot at its store in Guwahati, which involved increasing the number of trial rooms and providing a place for consumers to hang their smart phones to facilitate taking a selfie. In addition, more lights were added in every trial room. Banerjee informed that in just three months it resulted in a hike in conversions. This proves that position and number of lights in a changing room matters as the shadows, colour play affect one's perception of oneself.

“One innovation that we have been working on, is vertical illumination. It is a mirror with a light on top of the glass, facing the

“ ONE HUMAN CONNECT RESOLVES MANY ISSUES. LABOUR BEING CHEAP IN INDIA, HUMAN CONNECT CAN BE INDIA'S STRENGTH.”

Vivek Rathore, Salient Design Studio

consumer. The mirror has buttons to help change the colour of light to give the consumer an idea of how the dress looks in different lighting conditions such as daytime, evening and so on,” informed Bahal.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

Human intervention is another strength of physical retail and plays a vital role in in-store experience. “A lot of customers come back to the store based on their experience with the customer care associate. It can

be a differentiating factor, especially for boutique stores,” said Rachit Agarwal, Director, Simaaya.

Human touch is what helps build a relationship and trust with customers – it's extremely important especially in high value categories. “Trust is very important. And it can only be built on honesty of the sales person. A person well trained can handle a crowd, family can really help build a relationship and even increase ticket size. One human connect resolves many issues. Labour being cheap in India, human connect can be India's strength,” said Vivek Rathore of Salient Design Studio.

IN CONCLUSION

Summarising the discussion Agarwal of Manyavar said, “Lighting, relationship building, look and feel are elements that have been there in brick and mortar. The talk therefore should be about what more can be done to give an enhanced experience and keep brick and mortar relevant. It should be a good combination of all the above factors—with a right balance between technology and human touch.” 😊



▶ Interaction with staff is an important part of in-store experience