

RETAIL

Galleries Lafayette turns flagship store into polar wonderland with augmented reality

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Mockup of Galleries Lafayette window display for holiday 2016

By SARAH JONES

French department store chain Galleries Lafayette is leveraging its foot traffic and added attention around the holiday season to promote an environmental cause.

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The retailer's "Amazing Arctic Christmas" tells the story of a family of polar bears who must venture away from the North Pole due to melting ice caps, with the bears finally finding respite in Galleries Lafayette's flagship store on Boulevard Haussmann in Paris. Bringing the story to life in front of shoppers' eyes, the retailer has launched a mobile experience accessible in-store that uses augmented reality to create an arctic environment indoors.

"Retailers that are exploring ways to blur the line between the physical and digital sometimes refer to this as phygital, with tongue in cheek are ultimately going to win in the race for a unified commerce experience, giving the customer the ability to shop when, where and how they choose," said Dave Rodgerson, a retail business development executive at [Microsoft Canada](#), Toronto.

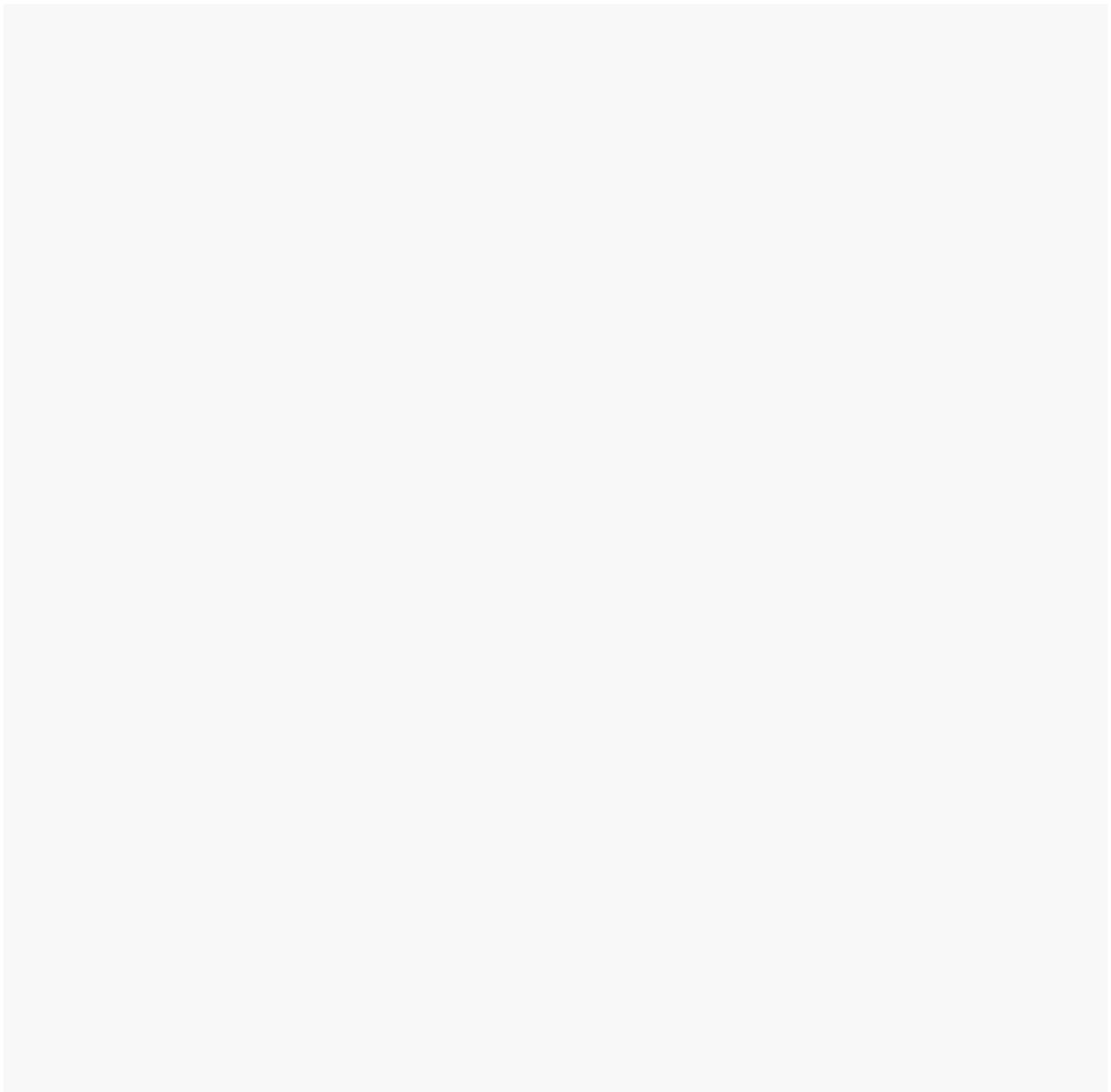
"The successful execution of a unified customer experience drives better customer engagement," he said. "This lends itself to larger baskets, more frequent visits and a higher gross profit over the long term."

Mr. Rodgerson is not affiliated with [Galleries Lafayette](#), but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [Galleries Lafayette](#) was reached for comment.

Polar expedition

Galleries Lafayette's window displays were unveiled on Nov. 8 with actress Audrey Tautou on-hand to cut the ribbon.

Within the panes, the polar bears' journey is told in cut paper art by Lorenzo Papace. He transformed blank pieces of white paper into shapes that relay the trip to Galleries Lafayette, where the family encounters an ice field made just for them.

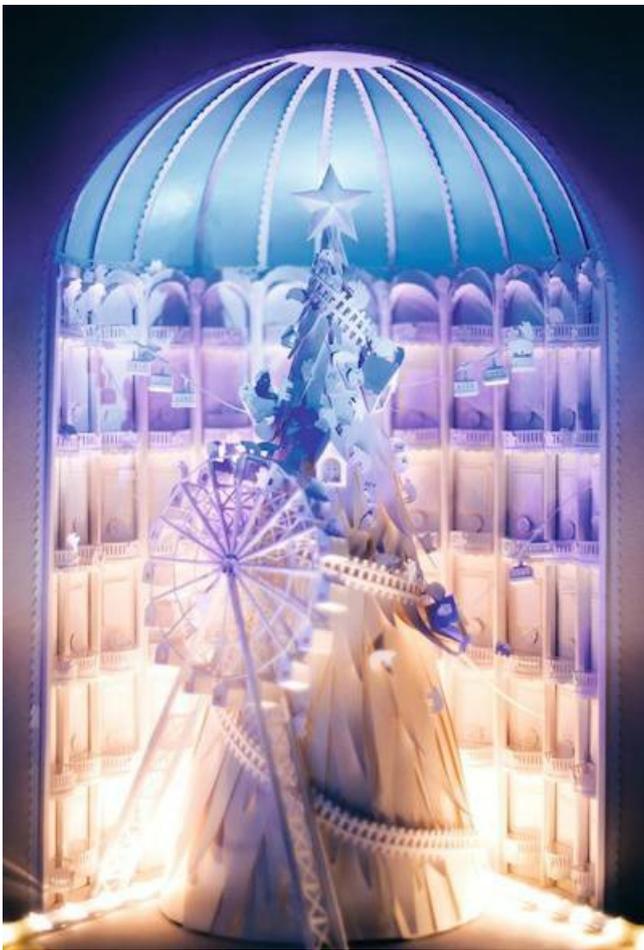


? D'une simple page blanche, l'artiste @lorenzopapace fait un conte de fe! Un sapin en papier, une grande roue et des ours blancs, c'est le Nol Extra Polaire qu'il a imaginé pour les Galeries Lafayette. Rejoignez-nous au magasin Haussmann mardi 8 novembre ds 18 heures pour fêter ce lancement et @theshoesmusic ! Lien en bio ?From a simple piece of white paper, artist @lorenzopapace creates a fairy tale! A paper tree, ferris wheel and polar bears, Papace has created an Arctic Christmas just for Galeries Lafayette. Join us on November 8th at 6 PM to celebrate the inauguration! Link in bio #GaleriesLafayette #NoelExtraPolaire

A video posted by Galeries Lafayette (@galerieslafayette) on Nov 3, 2016 at 4:27am PDT

The bears explore Galeries Lafayette's floors before setting off back to the North Pole, leaving visitors with the memory of their plight.

Mr. Papace also created the store's first all-paper Christmas tree. Placed under Galeries Lafayette's dome, the gigantic evergreen features whimsical elements such as cable cars and a ferris wheel.



Model of Galeries Lafayette's tree

Those who visit in-store will be able to experience the campaign through an interactive touchpoint developed with overlap reality startup Sky Boy. Through a free mobile app download or by using tablets provided by Galeries Lafayette, consumers can stand on the main store's second floor at one of the arches to launch the immersive content.

After pointing their device at a piece of paper with a drawing of a polar bear, a 360-degree experience begins. Polar bears bound through the snow in front of them, and virtual snowflakes fall. Eventually, a polar bear climbs the tree and begins to walk on a bridge toward the viewer.



Galeries Lafayette's augmented reality app

"We wanted this experience to be totally magical," said Francois-Xavier Goemaere, co-founder/chief operating officer of [Sky Boy](#). "The project is to immerse Galeries Lafayette's customers in a positive emotion, as that's what is expected for Christmas time.

"This experience is to be lived directly in the store and aims to participate in an innovative way to re-enchantment the place," he said. "But it will also be possible to share it on social network including Facebook 360."

This campaign also includes awareness building and outreach through a partnership with nonprofit Wild-Touch.

Along with watchmaker Blancpain, Galeries Lafayette and Wild-Touch are staging a photographic exhibition in-store.

Pictures on display will be from the 2015 Wild-Touch Antarctica expedition led by Luc Jacquet, with images taken by photographer/diver/marine biologist Laurent Ballesta and wild life photographer Vincent Munier ([see story](#)).

Wild-Touch will also host in-store conferences and workshops for children to help extend the message that this planet's biodiversity is at risk and needs to be protected.

Furthering its support of the organization's efforts, Galeries Lafayette will auction off paper models created by Mr. Papace as a benefit.

Extending the arctic theme to its gift selection, Galeries Lafayette will be carrying a number of handbags in ivory or pastel hues from brands such as Dior, Moynat, Gucci and Chlo, including exclusives and early previews from spring/summer 2017.

Additionally, on the retailer's Web site, consumers will be able to follow an advent calendar from Dec. 1-25, as a new window opens each day to reveal a prize from the likes of Burberry, Lancôme and YSL.

While snowy themes are common for holiday retail efforts, taking this stand on global warming may help differentiate Galeries Lafayette from competitors.

"Aligning yourself with a reputable cause is a key driver of loyalty especially when it comes to a new generation of customers who are typically recognized as digital natives," Mr. Rodgerson said. "These customers enjoy some measure of fulfillment when their brand is affiliated with a worthy cause.

"My only concern is that the alignment should be contextual to the retailer," he said. "Food for underprivileged children, for example, would make perfect sense for Sainsbury.

"Galeries Lafayette have created a partnership with Wild-Touch that adds context but it suggests a limited engagement. They would be better served to engage in a cause that can be sustained over the long term so that they can own it."

Augmented appeal

As marketers begin to expand their storytelling initiatives beyond social media platforms, virtual reality will become more influential in advertising, although only certain sectors will make it a priority.

With major brands including Coca-Cola and McDonald's trying their hand at virtual reality in a bid to connect with younger consumers and leverage mobile in innovative ways, companies are sitting up and taking notice. Although the technology may not be well-suited to every brand, executives in the food, retail, automotive and hospitality industries could hit a marketing home run by taking advantage of inexpensive cardboard packaging and mobile apps to create a memorable augmented viewing experience ([see story](#)).

For instance, British automaker Jaguar Land Rover unveiled a new way to launch an upcoming vehicle through augmented reality technology that allowed consumers to experience the model prior to its release date.

This initiative was in the 117 Land Rover retailers in the United Kingdom and allowed consumers to see the new car prior to its Jan. 22, 2014 release. The technology requires consumers to wear a headset that creates three dimensional view of the New Discovery Sport, which allows consumers to have an insight to the new product and also builds the anticipation for Land Rover ([see story](#)).

"Galeries Lafayette sought to innovate in the store for this Christmas, but what interests them is not technology for technology," Mr. Goemaere said.

"At Sky Boy because we come from the world of cinema, culture and art, technology is primarily in the service of stories and emotions," he said. "Furthermore we attach great importance to the visual quality of the project we deliver.

"The overlapped reality, unlike augmented reality, allows us to perfectly master the level of requirements expected by our most prestigious customers, including those in luxury."