

RETAIL

## Bricks-and-mortar presents unique experience opportunities

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For many consumers, the bricks-and-mortar experience is paramount. Image credit: LVMH

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By KATIE TAMOLA

NEW YORK For many affluent consumers, the experience of visiting bricks-and-mortar stores offers something more.

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With in-person shopping, consumers receive more than a product taking in the ambiance of the store interacting with other people and more leaving shoppers craving return trips. During a panel at *Luxury Daily's* digital Luxury FirstLook 2022 conference on Jan. 13, experts discussed how physical stores continue to provide brands unique opportunities to foster consumer loyalty with unparalleled experiences.

"If anything, COVID-19 taught us that consumers go shopping for more than just transactions and buying things," said Marie Driscoll, managing director for luxury and fashion at **Coresight Research**, New York. "Consumers shop to discover, to be social, to learn about brands, to learn about people and to learn about culture.

"What better place to immerse yourself in a brand than in the store where you have a full circular immersive experience that is sensory in every way from smell, touch and visuals," she said. "We think that this year, barring any continued adverse impacts from COVID-10, we are going to have a renaissance of physical stores."

The panel was moderated by Mickey Alam Khan, editor in chief of *Luxury Daily*.

### Becoming the brand

When consumers visit bricks-and-mortar stores, they expect experiences where a brand's values are reflected at every turn.

Consumers want to experience brand ethos and storytelling that resonates, technological advances that enhance shopping and informative sales associates. Physical stores are not only selling products, but what it means to be a part of the brand.



*After COVID-19 restrictions, shoppers are yearning for interpersonal interactions they cannot replicate through ecommerce. Image credit: Bloomingdale's*

The experiential aspects of in-person shopping cannot be replicated by ecommerce offerings, and visiting physical stores makes consumers feel a part of something.

"Customers go to bricks-and-mortar to dream, and we speak about online experience, but there's no online experience going to replace that," said Martin Shanker, CEO of [Shanker, Inc.](#), New York. "It's brands that not only create products that have the client dream, but help them also create the notion of connection, memorability, and relationship that have that customer keep coming back."

In curating their bricks-and-mortar locations, brands can also tap technology and data analytic tools in helping understand what consumers are looking for, and how to best give them what they want.

"Data analytic tools are going to be key to understanding what's really going on," said R.J. Hottovy, head of analytical research at [Placer.ai](#). "I think in this day and age, there are so many great companies out there that can really help you identify what it is your customer wants and the behavior, so you can overall improve the experience."



*Bloomingdale's launched its small-format store Bloomie's in summer 2021. Image credit: Bloomingdale's*

Other ways to implement technology in physical stores include technological try-on stations and click-and-collect services.

Considering the many restrictions and emotional ramifications related to the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers are still especially craving interpersonal interactions. Combined with a well-rounded in-person experience, a basis in brand reflection and excellent customer service, it is no wonder that so many consumers return.

#### Reaching and relating

Brands that are effective in utilizing bricks-and-mortar spaces reach their consumers in a variety of ways, through transparency, storytelling and emotional appeal.

While foot traffic at stores has not fully recovered from pre-pandemic levels and some restrictions have returned during the latest COVID-19 surge, both shoppers and retailers have discovered the importance of bricks-and-mortar in offering experiences that cannot be replicated as effectively online.

According to the 2022 retail trends forecast from [Placer.ai](#), brick-and-mortar stores with unique value propositions have had the most success in attracting shoppers last year ([see story](#)).

Luxury brands and retailers are also taking pop-up shops to the next level as they continue welcoming back shoppers after nearly two years of limited foot traffic amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gone are the days of only small and simple offerings as innovative and thoughtful pop-up shops have also emerged. With sustainability and innovation in mind, brands and retailers including Burberry, Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom are producing pop-ups that represent their ethos and values and promote nature and activity, while also providing unique shopping experiences ([see story](#)).

Bloomingdale's also recently introduced its product offerings and services to a smaller, highly-curated store concept ([see story](#)).

"The motivation of today's luxury customers that are in stores and want that bricks-and-mortar experience can be summed up in one word, which is relating," Shanker, Inc.'s Mr. Shanker said. "[These customers] are relating to the brand, relating to the stories, relating to the product and relating to people."

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