

A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a black face mask and a pink jacket, is holding up a dark-colored garment in a retail store. The background shows shelves stocked with folded clothes and hanging garments.

**Cestrian**

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# The in-store customer journey

How to optimise the retail experience to increase sales  
and keep shoppers coming back

# The in-store customer journey

When stores threw open their doors in April after a long period of lockdown, shoppers were keen to return. The figures were cautious, but encouraging, with footfall down by just 12% in comparison with the same time in 2019 (Internet Retailing) and queues around the block for many larger stores.

There's no doubt that online retail has firmly established itself over the past 18 months, but the excitement with which many shoppers returned to stores demonstrated a pent-up desire for the in-person shopping and browsing experience. In fact, such was the demand after the latest lockdown, that HMV reported a 150% increase in visitor numbers in the first two days after reopening, compared with the first two days following reopening in June 2020.

Such is the lure of the physical store, that even firmly established online giants like Amazon and Google are expanding their current business

models to include bricks and mortar locations – Amazon with its newly opened Amazon Fresh ‘no-checkout’ grocery stores, and Google, with its plans to hit the New York streets with its tech retail offer this summer.

What is becoming clear following the events of 2020 into 2021, is that stores have a different purpose for many customers now. Shoppers have become used to browsing and ordering online, but the excitement with which they've returned to physical retail demonstrates its very different value. Where previously physical vs online retail could be viewed as an either/ or choice, it's now clear that shops aren't simply about sales, they're there for an experience.

The challenge for retailers is to maximise this experience and keep shoppers coming back.

# Optimising the in-store journey

In order to create the experience customers are looking for from a store, it's important to understand that everyone's journey is different.

Some shoppers are browsing, some know exactly what they want, some already know the store and the brand and others don't. Some may simply be getting out of the house after months of isolation, meeting friends or visiting to return items, and don't have any intention of shopping at all.

The key is catering for all of these different types of visitors – and importantly, making the experience as enticing as possible to stay, browse, and make a purchase.





# Ideas to optimise the customer journey within your store

When optimising your customers' experience, it's important to consider every touchpoint. Here are some ideas to maximise your in-store journey at every step.



# Outside your store

With capacity limits in some shops, the customer journey can actually begin some way from your front entrance. If your customers are expected to wait to get in, use the opportunity to get them excited about what's inside, with product promotions and brand messaging attached to standing queue signage.

## Windows that wow

It goes without saying that your windows are one of your most important areas of marketing real estate. Keep them fresh and exciting with low cost, high impact graphics made of stretched fabric, interchangeable backdrops, selfcling graphics and interesting lighting.



# An enchanting entrance

Make your entrance as welcoming as possible. Use clear signage, floor graphics and overhead signs to direct and entice customers to different parts of your store. Localise your messaging and consider keeping a 'greeter' at your entrance to say hello, connect with customers and help with any queries.

## Easy navigation

Make sure your shoppers can find exactly what they need, quickly and easily. Remember they're still getting used to being out in public, so it's important to make the shopping experience as calm and easy to navigate as possible, without them having to speak to store staff if they'd prefer not to. Remember to make clear where your click and collect and returns areas are, and keep your sanitisers clear and visible to anyone who wants to use them.



# Promotions with impact

Where in the past, promotional displays were designed to encourage touch and engagement with products, getting hands on is now less desirable, so create impact around your promotions by heightening the visual experience. Place displays within the direct eyeline of your shoppers as they walk through your store. Use large graphic displays, photography and lighting to enhance the mood you want to create and think about converging digital with graphics to create an immersive experience, with video of the products in use to create movement and a more emotional connection with customers.





# Make purchase a no-brainer

Online, customers can research, read reviews, and understand quickly from product descriptions whether an item is right for them. Recreate the tactics online retailers use to 'nudge' customers into purchase by giving them all the information they need to make a decision. Offer information points throughout your store and display product descriptions and benefits close to your product ranges.

## Changing rooms

Changing rooms are a key differentiator between physical and online stores, so make sure shoppers feel that trying on is worth their time. Bring the in-store experience through – make sure your customers feel safe, and build on the messages, look and feel of your shop floor. Put the emphasis on customer service. Make sure swapping sizes is quick and easy and train staff to make recommendations on accessorising items your shoppers are trying on.







# New approaches to the in-store journey

# New approaches to the in-store journey

**Though the restrictions around cleanliness and social distancing are undoubtedly a challenge for retailers, they do in fact lend themselves to further opportunities to attract shoppers' attention.**

Queuing is now the norm, and more accepted than it was previously. The queue for the pay point can be used to entertain and upsell; for bigger stores, '5 minutes from here' signage can be used to persuade customers to continue waiting, while brand messages and low-priced impulse products positioned close to queuing areas can offer an important opportunity to increase spend.

Coffee shops within stores were already increasing in popularity pre-pandemic, and as shops become more of a destination, it's a model that may continue to grow for those who have room.

Meanwhile, click and collect has rapidly grown in popularity over the past year. Where the

service could previously be found in a small corner or the main pay point, now it's quite common to see larger click and collect desks within or outside stores – in themselves making a statement about the multiple ways to buy. But click and collect shouldn't just be seen as a service area; it's an opportunity to upsell too. Position yours in an area that requires shoppers to walk past your new ranges and impulse buys and ensure they can pay for any additional goods at your click and collect desk to maximise the opportunity.

Anywhere that encourages engagement with real people instead of an anonymous online form or chatbot is an opportunity to enhance the store experience, so ensure your customer service points for refunds and general enquiries are given just as much priority in your layout.

# Get the balance right in your store

Of course each store is different in terms of size, space and product offering, so it's important to ensure the journey is right. There's a fine balance between effort, reward and keeping things just fresh and exciting enough that shoppers aren't so distracted by promotions and displays that they fail to buy.

Speak to Cestrian's retail team to get the balance right for your store.



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