Top 50 Retail Experiences
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About Insider Trends</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About Imparta</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Lush</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pret a Manger</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Joseph Cheaney &amp; Sons</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Debenhams</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Dyson</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Cire Trudon</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 FaceCamp by FaceGym</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Scoop88</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 John Lewis</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Whole Foods</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Quiz</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Topshop / Topman Personal Shopping</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Mamas &amp; Papas</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 MyWaitrose by Waitrose</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Skin Laundry</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Nudie Jeans</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 PIRCH</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Kochhaus</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Amazon Loft for Amazon Web Services</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Nike+ membership perks</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 L’Occitane en Provence</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Dish + DUER</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Target Wonderland</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Waitrose</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Bobbi Brown Studio</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Lowe’s</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Samsung 837</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Vagabond</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Dropit</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Loop</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Thrive Global</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Topshop VR</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Made Showroom</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 Nike Makers’ Experience</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 Lego</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Vita Mojo</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 McDonald’s</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 Ikea</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 Argos</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 Penhaligon’s</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Sephora</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 Alton Lane</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 Starbucks Reserve</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 Bodega</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 Tommy Hilfiger</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 F3G</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 yReceipts</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 NearSt</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 Sprucebot</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Audi City</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What was your last really good retail experience? Was it with a particular brand or in a certain store, or even online? With so many ways and opportunities to shop available to us, it’s the fantastic customer experiences happening every day that stick in the mind more and more.

In celebration of this, the Insider Trends team has selected our 50 favourite retail experiences to serve as a spotlight on what the industry is doing well. They’re not necessarily the most costly, extravagant or high-tech retail experiences out there, but they are the ones that we think really connect when it comes to customer experience.

Each page has a write-up explaining why the experience makes the Insider Trends list. To be included the company or store had to personally wow us on multiple occasions, often through a combination of store design and layout, interactions with staff, added services, use of tech and generally by being pleasant to visit.

They are listed in no particular order, and we encourage you to visit any that you can to experience them for yourself - we’re big fans of them all!

In addition, we have partnered with Imparta, a leading Sales and Service training company that specialises in working with retail companies to improve the customer experience. They put a sample of stores from the list to the test by deeply evaluating the human interaction element of the customer experience.
Insider Trends regularly delivers retail safaris and trend presentations for brands such as L’Oreal, Clarins, Puig, Galeries Lafayette, Absolut Vodka, Samsung, Lego, Clarks, EE and Marks & Spencer.

We frequently work with senior team members - Unilever’s CEO, Clarks’ Managing Director and Carrefour’s Chief Operations Officer are some of the professionals who have commissioned our tours and talks.

Cate Trotter, Insider Trends’ Head of Trends, frequently interviews the companies inventing the future of retail and visits world-leading stores. She makes regular trend presentations all over Europe and has been named a Top 20 Global Retail Influencer by iQmetrix and a Top 50 Global Retail Influencer by Vend.

We’d love to hear about your greatest customer experiences.

Please do connect with Cate on LinkedIn or drop us an email at: greatexperiences@insider-trends.com

Maybe we’ll include your tip in the next edition!
About Imparta

Imparta is a global leader in the provision of Sales and Service training. We focus on Sales, Sales through Service and Service training, because these customer-facing parts of an organisation play a huge role in the value created for customers.

We have worked with many leading retail companies to engage, train and motivate their retail staff to deliver a seamless customer experience. The conversation between the customer and retail assistant is a critical opportunity, influencing the likelihood of purchase, repeat business and customer loyalty. We work with you to develop your customer conversations to break existing habits and empower your people to think and act in a new, different and customer-focused way.

Recent brands we have worked with include Calvin Klein, Nespresso, Telefonica O2 and the Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group.

Imparta’s Four-step Customer Experience Framework

- Welcome Me
  1. Acknowledged me, made me feel comfortable and welcomed.
  2. Used positive language to spark interest and create excitement.

- Understand Me
  1. Understood my communication style and adapted their style to match.
  2. Asked me questions to find out my needs and wants.

- Guide Me
  1. Inspired and educated me about the product.
  2. Understood my buying criteria and made recommendations that matched.

- Make It Easy For Me
  1. Made me feel good about my choice of product.
  2. Tried to gain commitment and overcome my objections.

If some of the stores do not successfully cover all points in the framework, we provide ‘Areas needing attention’, which highlight how the store can make the customer experience even better.

We chose a diverse range of stores to visit and followed a mystery shopping model to get an honest experience of each space. To accurately evaluate each store, we used our four-step Customer Experience Framework. An exemplary customer experience (5 stars) within a store would show the customer assistants successfully completing the points in each of the four major customer touch points, as shown below:
Whether it’s the global flagship store on London’s Oxford Street or the smallest store in its portfolio, Lush’s staff make its customer experience. They are always happy, enthusiastic and willing to chat, act as brand ambassadors and show customers the latest product additions or their own favourites. It shows that great staff can be motivated by more than money.

Staff are also empowered to give away products in ‘random acts of kindness’. It means they really pay attention to the interaction they have with a customer, whether they think you need a pick-me-up, it’s a special occasion or they just like your shoes!
Pret a Manger

Key Themes: Staff

Pret may be a familiar name, but it still offers one of the best staff experiences in the world, consistently across all stores. That’s pretty inspiring when you realise they have almost 500 stores across seven countries - it seems great staff experiences can be scaled!

Apart from being cheerful and conscientious, Pret’s staff also have the ability to give away free coffees at their discretion. You might get one if you are a regular customer, spend a lot of money in one go, experience a service hiccup in-store, or they simply enjoy chatting to you. It gives them the opportunity to treat each customer like an individual, which is what makes the experience so good.
English shoemaker Joseph Cheaney & Sons has been making and selling shoes since 1886. This heritage is strongly felt in its stores with the traditional design and storytelling elements emphasising the company’s expertise and the quality of its products.

Where Cheaney’s really excels though is with its aftersales experience, notably its complimentary shoe-care service. Once you’ve bought a pair of shoes you can pop in-store anytime to have them polished for free. It’s a simple gesture, but it makes you feel more valued as a customer. Plus, if you really love your shoes Cheaney’s offers a refurbishment service where you can pay to have your worn-out shoes repaired using the same expertise as they were first made with.
While from the outset, Debenhams’ customer experience could seem like any other department stores, in our experience they’re willing to go the extra mile.

One shopper bought his wedding suit from the menswear department in-store, but proceeded to lose a lot of weight which left it far too big. As it had been six months since the original purchase there was no obligation for Debenhams to help, but they refunded it at full price and ordered a replacement in the correct size - even though it has since been reduced in price. It means they actually ended up giving the customer some money back, but having a suit that fitted on the most important day of his life was far more valuable.
The Dyson store offers a whole new way of buying vacuum cleaners, which up until now has been a fairly dull experience. The space is built around the idea of finding the right vacuum cleaner for the individual customer’s life. You are invited to pick a type of dirt that is relevant to you (cat litter, lentils, paper shavings etc), scatter it across the type of carpet or wood flooring you have at home, pick the vacuum you’re interested in and try it out.

Staff spend a lot of time with the engineering team at Dyson’s HQ in order to learn the details of how each product works so they can better advise customers. This means they can field even technical questions without having to defer to others. You can also book in to have your hair washed, dried and styled in-store using Dyson’s new hair dryer. If you’re considering buying a £300 hair dryer there’s no better way to convince you of it’s value than to show you what it can do!

Key Themes: Staff; Experiences; Storytelling

Imparta’s Experience

Overall experience
An inviting space. This is a very engaging store. All Dyson’s latest products are presented on stands and customers can press buttons and play with them. The customer assistants were friendly and supportive, but lacked the skills to identify needs and turn conversations into sales. Their focus on the product, rather than the customer need, will lead to many missed sales opportunities.

Areas needing attention
- Customer assistants need to think about how to identify the specific needs and wants of their customers. They are very knowledgeable about the product, but there is no real understanding of how to match product features to customer needs.
- Training for customer assistants needs to include how to handle cost objections and in particular why a product is more expensive than other similar products that are available. Saying ‘it sells out all the time’ does not really progress the internal cost against value discussion the customer is having when considering the purchase.
- The booking of appointments to test products is an opportunity to inspire customers about the product. Customer assistants should take control and guide customers through the process and not just leave them to it.
Cire Trudon is an expert in perfumed candles, but it’s the brand’s storytelling that sets the shopping experience apart. The staff talk you through all of the products and the stories behind them - one has the scent of the polish of the Palace of Versailles, one has multiple notes that tell a story about Marie Antoinette, one is designed to enhance the smell of a log fire, one smells of the moon... It becomes less about the candle itself and more about what it makes you think and feel. The experience makes you want to spend £80 on a Cire Trudon candle, when you could buy a similar product for 10% of the price or less.
Billed as the 'UK’s only gym studio for the face', FaceGym takes a different approach to anti-aging. Its range of lifting and sculpting workouts for the face and skincare products offer a non-invasive face lift. It's the holistic approach that makes it a one-stop-shop for its customers and their concerns, rather than a place for products. FaceCamp, the seven-day skin bootcamp programme, mixes a tailored package of face workouts, products, diet plans, recipes, in-store treatments and advice to give you the best results. It's a fantastic experience that leaves your skin worries nowhere to hide.
Scoop86 is a hybrid retail store and club that has created a lifestyle space around the humble sneaker. There are more than 350+ shoes available to buy, from the rare to the best, but the experience is above and beyond your normal shoe shop thanks to Scoop86’s carefully cultivated community offering.

Mini exhibitions and audio tours reveal the making process behind the sneakers, while customers can also request personal touches to their shoes at the Maker’s Lab as they enjoy a drink in the lounge bar. If you’re a sneaker fan there’s no better customer experience.
Obvious maybe, but it still counts! John Lewis is often considered the one to beat when it comes to customer service and it’s easy to see why. Staff are given the freedom to solve customer problems in the best way possible, which often results in legendary service that customers tell each other about. For example, the High Wycombe store staff held a sleepover during a blizzard, opening toys to keep kids entertained. Meanwhile, a woman who went into labour in John Lewis Brent Cross was so impressed at the way the team helped her, she named her baby John Lewis!

It’s the kind of customer service that keeps you loyal, even if you haven’t experienced one of these fantastic acts yourself.
Whole Foods doesn’t just sell to customers, but helps them solve their dietary issues. Its in-store gluten-free tour is a fantastic example of this. The tours must be booked in advance so that staff can call the customer to chat through what their needs are - whether they have an allergy or want to experiment with gluten free.

When it comes to the tour they take the customer round the whole store and talk them through the different products. If you are interested in a specific product, they’ll often rip open a box on the shop floor and let you have a taste, which makes you more inclined to try new things. It also makes it a much more fun experience than sifting through packets on your own.

Key Themes: Enhanced services

Overall experience
As welcoming as a supermarket gets. Lots of knowledgeable customer assistants, which made it feel like they had specialists for each section. However, a few more service skills would enhance the customer experience and encourage us to go back.

Areas needing attention
• Customer assistants need to be more proactive in engaging customers, and not just let them drift around the store.
• While the customer assistants were really knowledgeable about the products, they do need to ask questions that help them really understand the customer’s lifestyle and food choices. This will mean they are better placed to guide the customer to exactly the right products for them.
• There are lots of free samples being given out, which is great! However, there then needs to be a conversation to influence the buying decision rather than just hoping customers will buy after tasting.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
It’s one thing for high-end retailers to offer super service, but it’s even better to see the high street doing the same. Quiz is one of our favourites when it comes to offering useful, innovative services to customers. At its Westfield Stratford flagship store, staff carry iPads to help customers order any size of item, even if it’s not in stock on the day. This gets rid of a major pain point for most of us when shopping - finding something you like and it not being in your size.

It gets even better though. If customers see items they like but don’t want to carry them home, they can order them from an assistant or in-store kiosk and have them sent straight to their home. What could be better!
Topshop / Topman Personal Shopping

Key Themes: Enhanced services

Topshop might be a high street brand, but its free personal shopping service offers a high-end experience. Available in a range of the brand’s stores, the most impressive personal shopping offering is the Topman space on the top floor of the Oxford Street store. It looks like a dream loft apartment and offers free drinks and Xbox gaming for customers, while they wait for their stylist to fetch their items.

It's an experience that's been tailored to the target customer and makes shopping a lot more enjoyable by removing the negative aspects. The service is also available digitally via Google hangouts so even customers who don't live locally can benefit.
Mamas & Papas has broken new ground for parenting stores with its Westfield White City flagship. The whole space has been designed from the perspective of the target customer - the busy parent - from the ground up. This makes the shopping experience far easier, especially if you have children in tow. Space on the shop floor has been given over to the back half of a car, so parents can test and learn how to fit different baby seats.

The store also offers a range of free personal shopping sessions and ‘parents to be’ events where customers can learn about staying fit, sleeping better, feeding and more. Plus, there are customer toilets and baby changing rooms at the back of the store for comfort - even though the shopping centre ones are just five minutes away.
In our opinion, Waitrose has one of the best loyalty schemes going. The MyWaitrose card gives customers simple, memorable and generous perks, including free tea or coffee whenever buying something in-store and a free newspaper when spending more than £5. You also get to choose 10 products to get a 20% discount on and can change your selection up to 10 times a month. This means that the benefit is tied directly to what you buy, rather than discounts on things you never want or need.

It’s telling that MyWaitrose has millions of members and is reportedly used in 70% of transactions.
Skin Laundry

Key Themes: Staff; Experiences

Skin Laundry specialises in offering affordable laser and light therapy services for skin. It really puts its money where its mouth is though, by offering a free first treatment to customers. This gives them more confidence to try something new and the results will hopefully keep them coming back. The experience gets even better though, as staff are happy to pass on their expertise without any obligation to buy. When we confessed our confusion over not knowing what skincare we should be buying, they wrote down all the active ingredients we should look out for - whether the products are bought from Skin Laundry or not. That sheet of paper has become our skincare bible.

Overall experience
Really impressive store and customer assistants - passionate, prompt, welcoming and engaging. We were asked questions about what we liked to understand what we were looking for and then guided to specific products.

Areas needing attention
• Skin Laundry should keep doing what they are doing; this experience has left us wanting more.
Nudie Jeans specialises in raw and prewashed jeans, with a focus on social responsibility and sustainability. A major feature of all Nudie Jeans stores are its repair areas. When you buy a pair of Nudies, you buy them for life - any time they get frayed, you can take them to a store where they’ll be fixed for free. All the worn out sections tell the story of your jeans, so it’s a fantastic way of serving customers and bringing the brand’s ethos to life.

The company also take in old pairs of Nudie Jeans for repair and resale as second-hand, and those that have reached the end of their life are recycled into other products like stools. As such, the story of those jeans continues.
PIRCH is using experiential showrooms to make buying kitchen, bathroom and outdoor fixtures and appliances more interesting. The company has connected up everything it sells so customers can see how the products work, what sounds they make, how water comes out of the taps etc. This helps customers differentiate between options and imagine how they might look in their own home. PIRCH also goes one further by offering free in-store cooking classes with dedicated chefs so customers can cook with an oven they’re interested in and fall in love with it. Customers are even able to try different showers in-store after hours.

The stores are very welcoming, with a refreshment area offering free coffee, lemon water and snacks baked fresh in-store, without any obligation to buy. It’s an incredible experience and we’re still telling our friends about it.
German grocery retail chain Kochhaus, or House of Cooking, has created experiential grocery stores where ingredients are laid out by recipe, rather than being grouped by type (eg sauces, bakery etc). Each ‘recipe table’ has everything the customer needs to make a dish, including a recipe card detailing all the steps. This lets customers discover something new and feel inspired, without having to walk around the whole store looking for the individual ingredients. Plus, if you’re looking for a quick meal idea they’re a great way to get in and out.

The stores also hold in-store cookery classes that customers can pay for, which further enhances the experience. It’s one of the best grocery shopping experiences we’ve ever had.
The Amazon Loft pop-ups are events and community spaces offering free training and support on using Amazon Web Services, as well as co-working space. The spaces are free to access for anyone - all you need to do is register. They also offer free coffee, Wi-Fi and snacks to keep visitors fuelled.

The London pop-up has a lovely inspiration wall, which highlights Amazon’s approach to development. The Loft is a great way of introducing new customers to Amazon Web Services, and keeping it top of mind without it feeling like just a sales pitch. It also shows the brand to be inclusive and generous.
Nike+ membership perks

Key Themes: Enhanced services; Loyalty

Nike has been investing in enhancing its services in a number of ways. Its Nike+ membership is free to anyone who wants to sign-up, but offers a valuable range of perks usually associated with premium paid memberships. These include booking a free 1-hour personal shopping session with a member of staff, free shipping on all orders, receipt-free returns and a 30-day ‘road test’ guarantee on almost every item. Certainly worth signing up for! You also feel the benefits the more you shop, which encourages you to become a frequent customer. And if you already visit regularly then it enhances the experience.

Overall experience

The store we visited looked fantastic – lots of open space and digital screens that were clearly engaging customers. However, it was not really obvious who worked there. We had great expectations of the Nike store, and while the layout was truly impressive, they do need to up their game on their assistants’ customer interaction and conversation skills to achieve a brilliant experience.

Areas needing attention

- The assistants need to be more proactive in engaging and welcoming customers, and not just chatting amongst themselves while the customers drift around (and out of) the store.
- The assistants should also take accountability for their interactions with the customer, and take ownership of the relationship while the customer is in-store. Saying ‘look over there’ doesn’t help a customer determine their needs or move them towards a purchase.
- Nike had a premium product range (self-lacing shoes!) that was strongly promoted in-store but required an appointment to try them on. To nurture the customer, the assistants could have used this scarcity value to create excitement and drive a future purchase – simply responding that an appointment is needed was a missed opportunity.
Sometimes the simplest things can make for the best experiences. And it doesn’t get much simpler than L’Occitane staff asking customers if they’d like a glass of water. It is however, a great way of making customers feel cared for and noticed without being pushy. They’re also likely to spend longer in the space if they are drinking, and it gives staff an opportunity to start a conversation that isn’t just about selling. L’Occitane isn’t the only brand to be doing this, but it is one that does it to great effect.
Dish + DUER’s flagship store in Vancouver is home to the world’s first in-store ‘Performance Denim Playground’, which lets customers performance test the products in a really fun way. The fantastic design includes a hammock, treehouse, swing and more, which you can explore while wearing the company’s jeans to see how they hold up. It encourages customers to hang out in the space and gives them confidence that the jeans they buy can keep up with whatever they want to do. Plus, the longer you wear the jeans the more you can imagine owning them!

Dish + DUER also uses the playground to get feedback on its products, which helps further improve them in the future.
Target’s Wonderland pop-up in New York last year was everything you’d want Christmas shopping to be. The design was a shoppable playground themed around the different items for sale. Kids could play on a Lego pirate ship and ball pool, race a remote control car around a track, take a selfie with the characters of Frozen or fly a drone around an obstacle course.

Just one of each product on sale was displayed, which gave more room over to the fun decor. Each customer was given a chipped lanyard that allowed them to swipe the display products they were interested in and add them to a virtual shopping list. This meant they could browse the space without having to carry all of the different things they wanted to buy. When they were ready to pay they took their lanyard to the till to bring up everything on their list. After a customer had bought something, Santa would deliver it down the in-store chimney as a final magical touch.

Key Themes: In-store experiences
Waitrose King’s Cross store in London not only looks gorgeous in its former warehouse setting, but has a large experiential element. At the heart of the space is a large cookery school that customers can pay to join and take part in classes. An in-store wine bar lets them taste different wines, whether they’re just grabbing a drink or looking to buy bottles for home. Plus, there’s even a live jazz band on Thursday nights. It’s very different to your standard food shopping experience, but it’s a space that you keep wanting to go back to.

Key Themes: In-store experiences
Bobbi Brown Studio

Key Themes: Enhanced services

The beauty space is a crowded one, but the Bobbi Brown Studio spaces are one of our favourites. The stores are geared towards sampling and trying out the brand’s ‘natural-looking’ makeup, which makes them somewhere you want to explore. A menu of free in-store makeovers lasting 15-60 minutes (depending on the look chosen) acts as a real-life demonstration of why Bobbi Brown products are better. Customers can get inspired and learn how to achieve the same results at home, which in turn encourages them to buy. The service is made even easier by letting customers view available session and book online in advance so they can walk straight in and begin.

Imparta’s Experience

Overall experience
Really friendly and approachable makeup station. Lots of open space between all their products. Our customer experience at Bobbi Brown was good, however could have been so much better with a few touches of personalisation throughout the interaction.

Areas needing attention
- Store staff need to think about how to personalise the interaction more effectively, ask questions that identify the customer’s real needs (not just questions focused on what they’ve used before and like).
- Need just a little bit more reading of the customer and more guidance about other products which will complement what they were looking for – lots of opportunities to cross sell and upsell being missed.
- If the customer disagrees with your choice of product for them – think about how to position it differently or listen and make different recommendations – saying it will grow on you doesn’t instil the customer with confidence in your choices.
Lowe’s new ‘Holoroom How To’ experience builds on its fantastic Holoroom immersive design and visualisation technology to offer a new way of learning DIY skills. The How To lets people learn how to execute specific DIY projects by doing them in virtual reality first. This almost acts as a trial run at doing the project, without any waste or mess, and helps give customers the skills and confidence they need to do it in real life. It’s part of a move by Lowe’s to be more useful to customers and build a deeper relationship, but more than that it’s an exciting look at how VR might change retail.
Samsung 837

Key Themes: In-store experiences; Tech

Samsung 837 is the brand’s New York ‘digital playground’ that lets customers ride rollercoasters or go surfing in virtual reality, take immersive 3D pictures to send friends and family around the world, design a personalised phone cover that’s printed for free while they wait and more. The installations regularly change, but there’s always something cool going on and therefore it’s always worth going back to. The huge three-storey high screen is also a serious wow point when you walk in and hosts events and live-streaming. The space offers a lot of value-added services for Samsung customers such as technical support and hangout areas that make them want to spend time in it.
Next time you’re in London make sure you drop into independent wine retailer Vagabond. The store gives customers the freedom to try any wine they want from the in-store tasting machines. You simply load a top-up card with credit and then put it in the machine and press the button of the wine you wish to try. You can buy just a sample, a small glass or a large glass, which makes it easy to find your new favourite.

The stores have tables for customers to sit at and enjoy their drinks, and they can also order food platters to have with them. It’s an enjoyable experience in its own right, but it also helps customers learn more about wine and why they should pay for more for different wines. They can also buy bottles of their favourites to take away to continue the experience at home.
Our pick for a game-changing innovation for retail, DropIt is a UK-based technology company that has pioneered a ‘hands-free’ shopping experience to eliminate one of retail’s biggest pain points - carrying lots of bags around town. The company has signed up partner stores across London’s West End, where customers can leave their shopping for delivery to any address in London on the same day, or elsewhere in the UK the next day.

Customers can drop off shopping in one or more stores and the bags will be gathered into one delivery. They don’t even have had to buy anything in the partner store to leave their bags there. A day pass costs just £10 with no limits on how many bags you can drop, which makes it a great option for tourists or during busy shopping seasons like Christmas.
If you’re in the market for new furniture, you may find the experience at Loaf more enjoyable than most. The company does a really nice job of adding little details to its shopping experience that keep customers and their kids happy.

The stores offer a range of free soft drinks that customers can grab from a chiller whenever they want, retro table arcade games, retro vending machines that dispense a finger football game (with chocolate football) free of charge, plus little notes around the store to maintain the fun vibe. A bank of computers mean customers can place orders without waiting for an assistant if they’re tied up, which makes for a more pleasant experience.

Key Themes: In-store experiences; Quick wins

---

Impartas's Experience

Overall experience
Overall the look and feel of the shop is beautiful, and they had some really nice customer-focused touches. For example, they had little stands asking you to ask for help. There are loads of different rooms, and exploring them is a wonderful treat. To really create an outstanding customer experience there needs to be greater consistency in customer interaction. The quality of interactions varied considerably depending on the customer assistant we spoke with.

Areas needing attention
• There is a need to drive a consistent approach to customer experience – we had one amazing experience and one very poor – this was down to the attitude and skill of the customer assistant.
• It would be great if they explored lifestyle questions and then expanded our knowledge of all the products that might suit our preferences. Currently any questions are product-led rather than needs-led.
• Even when the store is busy, Loaf need to ensure that the focus remains on the customer and that there is a consistent framework for delivering customer excellence. Being busy isn’t an excuse for poor customer service.
Led by Huffington Post founder Arianna Huffington, Thrive Global is working to end stress and burnout by championing a cultural shift. In order to illustrate its approach to wellness Thrive Global launched a New York pop-up that encompassed everything about the brand.

As well as promoting Arianna Huffington’s book on the subject and other Thrive services, the space sold all sorts of products linked to wellbeing from gadgets to mattresses. The showpiece was a fleece-lined room where anyone could take a nap, as part of its advocacy of good sleep. It really helped to show customers what the brand was about without just preaching at them.
This summer Topshop ran an immersive ten-day pop-up experience called SPLASH!, which has virtual reality at its heart. The Oxford Street store window was host to a water slide installation that customers could sit on and don a VR headset to go on an exciting virtual water slide ride through London.

The theme was carried on through the store with ice cream pop-ups, swimwear personalisation, social sharing and even the smell of suncream pumped in! The idea gives customers reasons to go in-store beyond shopping, but also makes the experience of shopping much more fun and interesting.
Made.com’s physical stores offer one of the best connected shopping experiences going. The showrooms house a selected edit of top Made products, supplemented by a wall of hundreds of drawers containing postcards of all the other items available. Both the drawers and the physical products are equipped with an NFC-enabled tag. You can use the in-store tablets to tap items that you want to add to your digital shopping list. You can then email it to yourself for later or use the in-store computers to pay and arrange delivery. The tech is so easy to use that it enhances the entire experience, and the seamless connection between online and offline means you can shop however you want.
One of the new retail experiences we’re most excited about is Nike’s New York installation that lets visitors design their own shoes (including the pattern of the fabric) and have them made on-site while they wait. The whole process from start to finish takes just 90 minutes, which means you can have your very own manufactured-to-your-preference shoes in your hand faster than your average meal out.

Currently invite-only, the Nike Makers’ Experience completely reinvents what it’s like to buy shoes, making it both quick and personal to customers. We hope it becomes a mainstream service!
Everything about Lego is fun, but its flagship stores are one of our favourite places to visit as they feel more like exciting museums and play centres than shops. The London store is the largest Lego store in the world and features a 6m-high model of Big Ben, a giant serpent, a panorama of London, plus a huge tube train where customers can take a seat and pose for photos - all made of Lego.

Customers can create a personalised Lego mosaic to take home with them. They can also pick up a Lego passport to collect stamps as they visit different Lego stores around the world. It’s a great way of building loyalty in a way that uses excitement rather than offering discounts.

Imparta’s Experience

Key Themes: In-store experiences; Quick wins

Overall experience
A busy and bustling store. Plenty of customer engagement with the products, for example lots of people taking pictures of themselves in large Lego structures. There was insufficient staff to provide any meaningful one-to-one service so it all felt very transactional and hectic.

Areas needing attention
• The store greeters need to be able to have a quick but efficient customer-focused interaction that is tailored to the customer. Currently they behave like policeman directing traffic, and do not add any value to the customer experience.
• There is a lack of proactive engagement due to numbers, and customer assistants are very difficult to approach as they are so busy. If you need help, you’re on your own.
• There is obvious loyalty and excitement from customers about the brand and being in the store. However, there are plenty of opportunities for reinforcing this and increasing basket size being missed due to the lack of any meaningful customer-staff interactions.
Vita Mojo offers an exciting glimpse at the future of food retailing. The company allows customers to order personalised healthy meals that are made quickly. Customers order via their smartphone or in-store iPads with the freedom to completely customise their meal by choosing how much of each ingredient they want.

Full nutrition and allergy information is shown for the customers’ choice, helping them choose the perfect meal. Customers can request to pick up their orders within a specific five minute slot, eliminating queueing and helping them eat well, even on the busiest of days. Each purchase is saved to a ‘past orders’ list for easy reordering. Vita Mojo is also working on a system that links with Fitbits and home DNA kits to provide tailored recommendations that will suit customers’ health goals and daily activity.
McDonald’s has always been about fast food, but the company has managed to make that even faster with the introduction of its large in-store touchscreens enabling customers to order without queuing at the till. It’s a simple concept, but one that works perfectly for the company’s customers base and shows how tech can be made useful. The screens are easy to use and enable quick payment with a card. The customer’s receipt includes an order number, which is called out once it’s ready to pick up. The system helps to speed up service and eliminate pain points, making the experience more pleasant for customers.
Ikea's click-and-collect space in London's Westfield Stratford is only around 5% of the size of its standard store, but it provides a hugely valuable service. It enables customers to buy from Ikea without making it a day trip to one of the larger stores, which may be a long way from their home. They can also easily reach this space by public transport, which makes Ikea much more accessible for those without their own transport.

The store is still large enough though that customers can access other Ikea services, such as sitting with a staff member to design their new kitchen and browsing a range of products and textiles.
There are a lot of good points to the Argos experience, but without a doubt one of the most useful is the ability to see what is in stock before you visit a store. You can even reserve and pay for an item and pick it up immediately, or have it delivered for a fee. This provided very beneficial to us ahead of a major presentation when we found we need a remote control battery and didn’t have access to any transport. We placed an order with Argos at 5.55pm asking for it to be delivered to our hotel and it arrived by 7.10pm - saving us a huge amount of time and stress. A fantastic end-to-end service from our perspective.
Penhaligon’s creates innovative perfumes with unusual packaging that tell a story. With over 40 fragrances to choose from, it can be hard to know which to go for. At the back of the brand’s Regent Street store there is a large touchscreen that invites you to answer a set of questions. It then uses these to recommend five fragrances and you can tap on each one to find out more about them. A lot of the testers for these fragrances are located right under the screen.

It’s a very simple way of quickly helping customers find the right things to try, especially if they’re not in the mood to talk to a member of staff. Even if you’re not taken with the perfumes suggested, the experience gives customers a starting point when talking to the staff about what they want.

**Imparta’s Experience**

**Overall experience**

Great store. Very happy and personable staff who had details and stories for everything and showed a real interest in us by asking questions about who we were and how our lives worked. This interest and deep knowledge allowed the assistant to tailor the experience in a dynamic fashion to ensure that we were consistently engaged and interested in returning.

**Areas needing attention**

- Penhaligon’s should keep doing what they are doing. A store and staff with charisma and passion that clearly shines through to create a brilliant experience that left us wanting more.
Sephora’s technologically advanced Virtual Artist makeup service lets customers try on different lip colours in augmented reality to see what they look like on them without actually putting them on and wiping them off. It’s a fantastic way to get a better representation of how colours look than just looking at swatches and means customers can try many different shades in a couple of minutes - something that isn’t possible to do physically. This makes for a much better experience and helps the customer narrow down the shades they might actually want to try out. The technology can be used in Sephora stores and at home via the company’s app.
US menswear company Alton Lane specialises in bespoke suits, trousers, shirts and more, made using a combination of 3D body scanning and hand measurements to get exactly the right fit. Although technology is involved, the experience retains the luxury feel of a proper tailors. The stores look more like old fashioned gentlemen’s clubs than high-tech spaces. Customers can relax on a Chesterfield with a whisky while discussing fabric options, which makes for a much more enjoyable experience than browsing rails. It’s such a great experience we wish they’d launch one for women!
The Starbucks Reserve store improves on the coffee shop experience in two ways - customers can use Starbucks’ Mobile Order + Pay app to order in advance and pick up instantly if they’re in a rush. But if they want a slower experience, they can sit down, place an order from their table with a waiter, and marvel at the quirky equipment the staff use to make the store’s fancy coffees. This gives the space a more upmarket, special feel than the typical Starbucks experience. Both options eliminate the key pain point of queuing, which helps make for a better customer experience. It also means that whatever your mood, or however your day is going Starbucks can meet your caffeine needs.

Key Themes: High tech and low tech
Bodega is a brand-new retail tech startup founded by two former Google employees. The company is trialling small unmanned cabinets filled with everyday essentials for use in common areas in flats, gyms, offices and campuses. It works much like Amazon Go, but in a cabinet. You use a one-time code from the Bodega app to open the cabinet, grab what you need and automatically get billed for it. The products in each cabinet may vary as they are designed to be relevant to the location, but with Bodega using data on sales to tweak the contents over time.

The concept means that new types of spaces can easily integrate retailing, which makes life more convenient for customers. It could mean no more late night trips to the corner shop for milk!
Tommy Hilfiger’s Regent Street flagship is one of the most technologically advanced stores out there. All of the products contain RFID chips, which help improve stock check speed and accuracy, but also the customer experience. The in-store fitting rooms will recognise any products taken in enabling customers to touch the smart mirror to request another colour or size. This pings a notification to the store assistant’s smart device prompting them to bring it to the customer. Together it makes for a much better fitting room experience than going in and out with different options.

Other displays around the store let customers place a product in a ‘nook’ to see which other sizes and colours of are available in store today, and which can be ordered from the online store. The technology helps customers to self-serve more, with staff on-hand if needed.

**Key Themes:** High tech; Better services

**Imparta’s Experience**

**Overall experience**
A great store layout. We loved the fresh feel and the new in-store technology that cleverly supports the customer’s buying experience. However, the levels of customer interaction from the customer assistants and their explanation of the technologies was a bit lacking. This meant that the digital and human experience elements did not work together as seamlessly as they might. This store is so close to creating an exceptional end-to-end customer experience, but does not quite deliver it.

**Areas needing attention**
- The digital technology looks impressive, but it feels like it drives you to self-serve (and this may be the aim). The opportunity is there to have customer assistants working with the digital technology and customers to deliver a great experience, as well as progressing and extending their customer buying decisions. We didn’t see anybody using the technology (apart from ourselves) while we were in the store.
- There is little proactive engagement from the customer assistants, but they are very attentive when asked a question. They need to ask more questions about customer needs, rather than just asking about size and colour.
- The store offers personalisation of clothing, which is a great differentiator. This needs to be brought more into customer conversations to encourage the customer to experiment and think differently.
F3G is a digital agency that specialises in omnichannel technology for the retail space. Its technology helps brands learn about customer activity and preferences. When a customer walks into a store, everything the brand knows about the customer can be sent to the assistant’s Apple Watch, helping the assistant tailor the conversation.

Even more exciting is that as the customer picks up products, digital displays in-store are triggered to provide information on the product, which can help customers to make more informed decisions. Staff can also use the digital displays to see how many times each product has been interacted with, which can help inform stock and merchandise decisions.
yReceipts

Key Themes: Fast, High-tech services (add on)

Receipts is one of the first independent digital receipt providers and data capture companies, working in 30 countries worldwide. The company makes it easy for retailers to send customers digital receipts, so they can quickly find them in the future if they need to return or exchange items.

For the customer this eliminates the need to keep their paper receipts - and we all know how hard it can be to find them when you need them! The digital receipts can be accessed on-the-go via the customer’s smartphone, making returns a much more pain free experience for both customers and staff.
Sometimes shopping online isn’t the quickest way of buying something. NearSt is a UK tech startup working to get people back into their local shops by letting them search for what they want to buy, from books to electronics and pharmacy items, and telling them which stores in their vicinity has it in stock. They can then reserve it for immediate pick-up or order it for delivery to their home. It’s an easy-to-use service, which can help customers get what they want in their hands faster. It also removes any fruitlessness from local shopping as it means you don’t have to go in and out of stores to see if they have what you want.
The Sprucebot was created by Spruce Labs as a way of improving the customer experience in its own store. Sprucebot makes it easy for store staff to access everything a brand knows about a customer across all channels. The tech is largely invisible to customers visiting a space that features it, but they benefit from more personalised attention from staff.

Sprucebot also enables a 'handshake checkout' - if a customer has linked their credit card to Sprucebot in the past, they can verbally confirm each subsequent purchase in-store to be billed instantly. This removes any waiting around the payment process. It’s a light-touch use of technology that’s almost magic for customers.
Audi City

Key Themes: In-store services

Audi City is a different way of car shopping that lets you buy on the high street, rather than having to travel to an out-of-the-way showroom. Customers can design their dream Audi using a large intuitive touchscreen display, rotate the car and inspect the design of the interior. You can ‘fling’ your design to a floor-to-ceiling screen that displays the car at almost life-size and play animations that show how it will look in different light conditions. There are also tactile elements like leather and paint sample to look at and feel. The store will print a personalised brochure to remind you of everything you’ve chosen, along with a unique code so you can carry on designing your car online. Because you have designed it yourself it’s easier to fall in love with it and you can book test drives through the space if you want to try your chosen model out.

Imparta’s Experience

Overall experience
From the outside, you can see two beautiful Audi R8s in a well laid out and attractive viewing area. If anything like the care and attention that had gone into the cars and the store had been invested in customer service, we might just have bought one!

Areas needing attention
- Customer assistants need a proactive approach to customer engagement. We were just left to wander around, play with the technology and touch and feel the cars with no guidance or support.
- The Audi brand deserves more. Customers have high expectations of high-end brands. The lack of passion or customer interest in-store creates a dissonance with the brand, making it a particularly disappointing experience.
- Customer assistants need training to be able to use the digital technology in a way that supports the customer conversation and the buying process. Engaging with the customer and showing them how to build their own car is a great way to get them excited about what they could own. This opportunity was missed.
As these 50 examples show, good retail experiences have one thing in common - they focus on inspiring the customer to buy, whether through store layout, technology or staff. The delivery can differ, whether it’s friendly and enthusiastic staff, going the extra mile, easy-to-navigate store design, useful tech, removing pain points or delighting with surprises, but they’re all thinking about the impact on the customer.

This is vital because the future of retail is experience, not products. When you can buy anything, from anywhere, with the push of a button, it is the experience around the purchase that becomes the differentiator.

Do let us know if any of the examples have inspired you in your own retail experiences.