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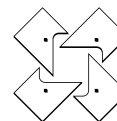
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Vasant Jante
Editor & Publisher

Back to business and what it means ...

First things first. As you can see, we are back in print. In a sense it's in sync with the retail industry itself - brands are getting back to the brick and mortar mode and there is a sense of cautious optimism at play. As we dive back into the printed platform, we are hoping too that businesses slowly but surely pick up momentum and the whole retail eco-system gradually gets into the high gear mode. Our back to print mode also reflects the reality of the brick and mortar/omnichannel dynamics. While digital is certainly an inescapable reality, the feel of physical reality - whether it is holding a magazine in your hand and reading it or being at a store - is more about a primal human need. So the physical-digital co-existence will shape the way businesses thrive in the future. For example, the content consumption/media industry, of which we are a part, is going through a major churning as consumer (reader/viewer) behaviour changes and access to information happens across multiple channels. This has essentially tossed up two very critical question in front of content producers/publishers - 1.How to make the content original, relevant, meaningful, and experiential 2. How to make the content drive revenues. For those in the print business, the questions assume greater significance and challenges. Brands operating in the retail space face a similar challenge - how to make the physical store experience different, meaningful and profit enabling. As we head into a post Covid world, let's resolve to apply the learnings and experiences of the past few months, be in step with market changes and work out smarter business models that benefit the whole eco system. Wish you all a very Happy Dussehra!

Vasant Jante

Vasant Jante
Editor & Publisher

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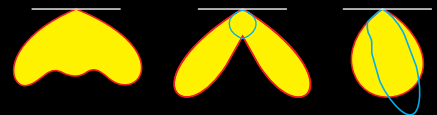
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Contents

COVER STORY

- 6 Is Retail Restart finally kicking off?

DESIGN DIGS

- 10 Anand
13 Landmark Xcite
16 Organic Mandya

DESIGN DIGS INTERNATIONAL

- 18 Godiva
22 ace & tate
26 LAS furniture

VISUAL MERCHANDISING

- 30 Window to a festive spirit

BUSINESS & SOLUTIONS FIXTURES

- 36 Can smart store fit-outs enable better business?

BUSINESS & SOLUTIONS TECHNOLOGY

- 40 'Wanted: Tech solutions that are affordable & easily adaptable for retail'

ONE-2-ONE TECH TALK

- 42 Mahesh M, CEO - Creaticity

44 RETAIL ROUNDUP

46 RETAIL SOLUTION PROVIDERS



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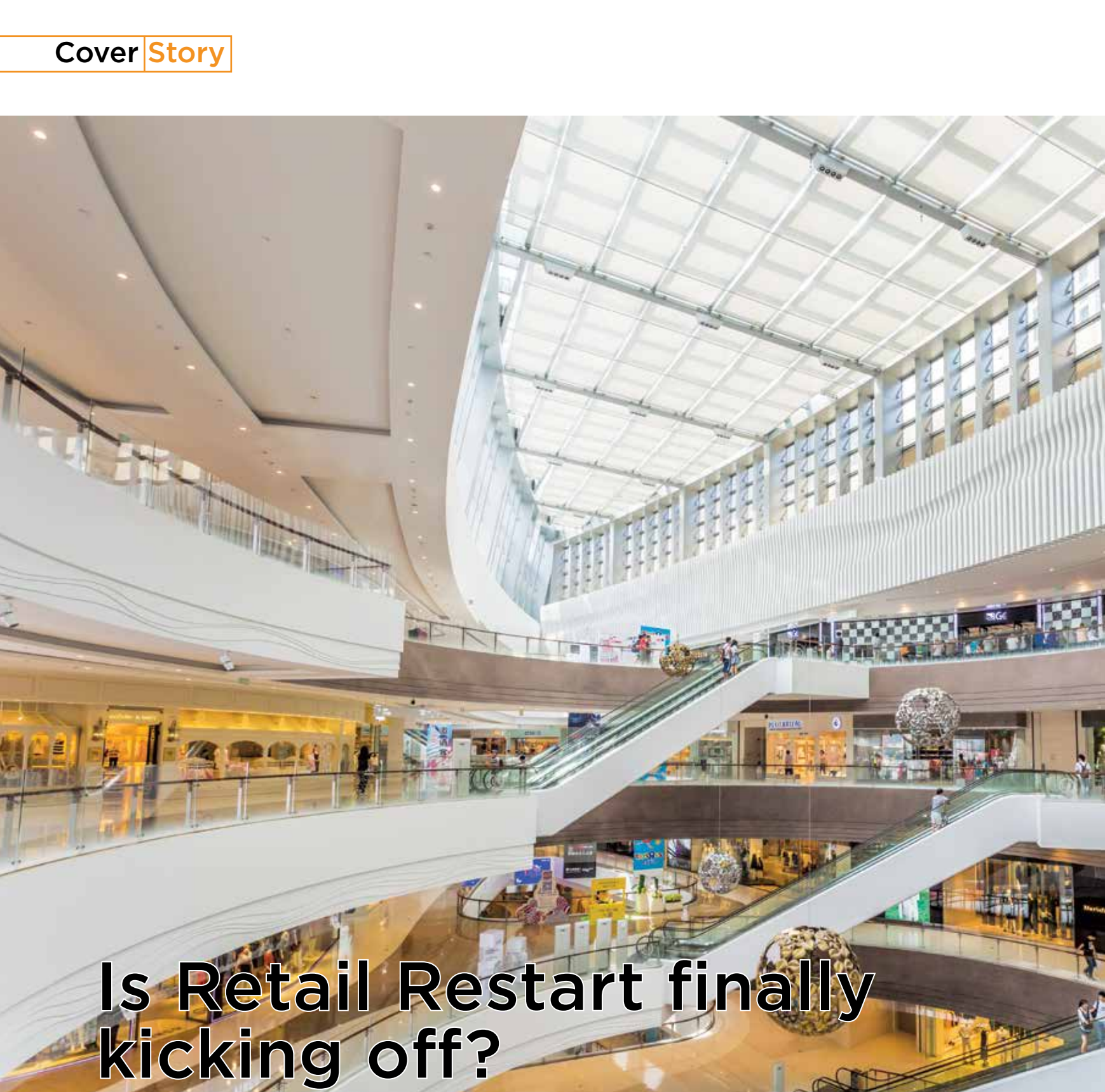


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Is Retail Restart finally kicking off?

There has been closure. There has been fear. There has been delay. There has been a great deal of loss for retailers during the past few months. As pandemic broke out and lockdown measures took hold, the retail industry underwent a radical transformation. Again & again, there has been a challenge, and retailers have come through it.

Now, as the festive season is coming closer, retailers head into their most important part of the year. While it may not look like any festive season retailers are used to, it might just help them to recover from their losses and capitalize on the traditional shopping period. But, thanks to COVID-19, retail does not resemble what it did in years past. So how will this year's festive season play out and what will it mean in the days to come for the industry as a whole?



About this time every year, retailers look to deal with familiar challenges: planning in-store activations, supply chain pressures, seasonal discounting, increased product demand, and spikes in web traffic—to name a few. But the 2020 festive season is going to be different.

In addition to exploring new ways of delivering their products into the hands of customers, many retailers

have changed the way they operate, with more changes likely to come. For example, brands like Tanishq, Kalyan Jewellers, Shoppers Stop, Skoda, Crocs, and Titan, among others, have all hopped on to video calling option to offer a holistic and hassle-free shopping experience.

Footwear brands Metro Brands Ltd and Bata India are interacting with customers through Whatsapp. A host of other brands including Da Milano, Chumbak, Meena Bazaar and Metro Brands, are also ramping up their e-commerce verticals, further changing the digital and physical dynamics of the season.

While many continue to spend huge sums on digital channels, large retailers are also betting big on experiential retail. Brands like Trent Ltd. from Tata Group, global sportswear brand Puma, sporting goods retailer Decathlon, custom furniture brand Woodenstreet, and clothing brand Levi's are creating a new wave in the retail sector by launching new innovative concept stores.

Add to that, retailers, are beginning to move forward with expansion plans that had been in place before the pandemic. For example, brands like UNIQLO, luxury watch retailer Ethos, men's wear brand Indian Terrain Fashions Ltd, technology giant Lenovo & electronics manufacturer Xiaomi are opening new stores while many brands like online shopping platform Nykaa, Tupperware, Biba are re-opening their physical retail stores.

With nearly 85 percent of the retail space now operational, and small green shoots of recovery beginning to emerge, retailers are banking on the coming festive season for a revival in consumption and some recovery at least in the fourth quarter. The question remains whether customers are ready to return to stores this festive season?

Cautious Optimism

Unlock 1, 2, and 3 have offered some relief to the mounting stress of retail sector even if the business still looks far from usual. And if Independence

Day weekend footfall and sales across malls are anything to go by, a majority of large retailers look confident that buyers would come back soon.

"Like all non-essential categories, the path to recovery was slow to begin with, when markets started opening in phases from May onwards, but we see very encouraging signs as the consumer sentiment is coming back amongst the youth. Considering the physical retail has started opening up and consumers are stepping out now for more than just essential purchases, we are expecting a healthy growth in the upcoming festive season," says **Ayushman Chiraneewala, Head of Product & Marketing - Fastrack, Titan Company Limited.**



Ayushman Chiraneewala

Sasikumar Ramaswami, President - Group Head - Store Design & Projects, Landmark Group - Lifestyle International Pvt Ltd, too foresees a good festive season for retailers. **"People always wait for festivals and occasions to spend and make a change. This festive season will see a huge inflow of customers into brick and mortar stores. While online is always an option, this time people will come to stores to experience the products as traditionally we Indians like to feel the products, experience the shopping streets, malls, get the festive mood by being outside."**

With slow and gradual re-opening of sectors, the retail industry is already seeing some green shoots, especially in states that are allowing retail businesses to operate without many interruptions. Retailers believe the festive season itself to



Lokendra Ranawat
CEO, Woodenstreet

However, increasing retail costs have forced retailers to rethink the space allocation & utilization giving rise to new formats like pop-ups etc.

According to Charath Narsimhan, "Physical stores will need to be reimagined, especially in the metros. More interactivity, Click & Collect kind of approach, pop-ups in malls will be the way to go. If it's only a product to be purchased consumers will go online. But the experience of a physical store and the visual appeal will not be replicable online"

Echoing the same sentiment, Sasikumar Ramaswami adds, "I feel there will be a change in the retail sector for at least the next 3 years. Going forward, it will not be about huge spaces, but efficient spaces, convenient spaces, relevant spaces."

Kiran Ranga says "While micro-stores and digital stores are very important and relevant for the current concept, the future depends on the product category. So to this extent, some categories will not go completely digital."

Way Ahead for Retail Solution Partners

Meanwhile, as retail brands continue to adapt to new business models, fueled by digital disruptions & rocketing customer expectations, the expectations from retail solution providers towards convenience, personalization, experience, sustainability and, of course now safety are also accelerating in the same pace .

Sasikumar Ramaswami says this is a significant opportunity for retail partners - store fixtures, lighting, signage manufacturers, store

designers and architects - to forge strong relationships with customers as their role will now be crucial than ever.

"They need to rework on the cost of products, give value-added services, post-sale services, introduce new technology that will reduce the Capex and Opex of the stores, and be more transparent in transferring the benefit of technology to retailers. While there could be lesser demand for a few years, this is the time to reinvest on building relations, value engineering, and technology to retain business and make the bond stronger with retailers."

Ayushman Chiranewala adds, "The expectation from the partner & vendor community is to think out of the box and come up with flexible solutions to use smaller spaces effectively without compromising on the brand tonality & aesthetics. Technology is certainly going to play a major role in enabling this."

Charath Narsimhan remarks, "The store of the future needs to be

flexible - easy to move around to adapt to different elements that need focus. It needs to have a much higher degree of 'sustainability factor' - Materials that are less power-intensive, more recyclable, etc. The store experience and the softer aspects of storytelling will take greater precedence in the store of the future. Store designers, architects and partners of retail solutions must work towards that."

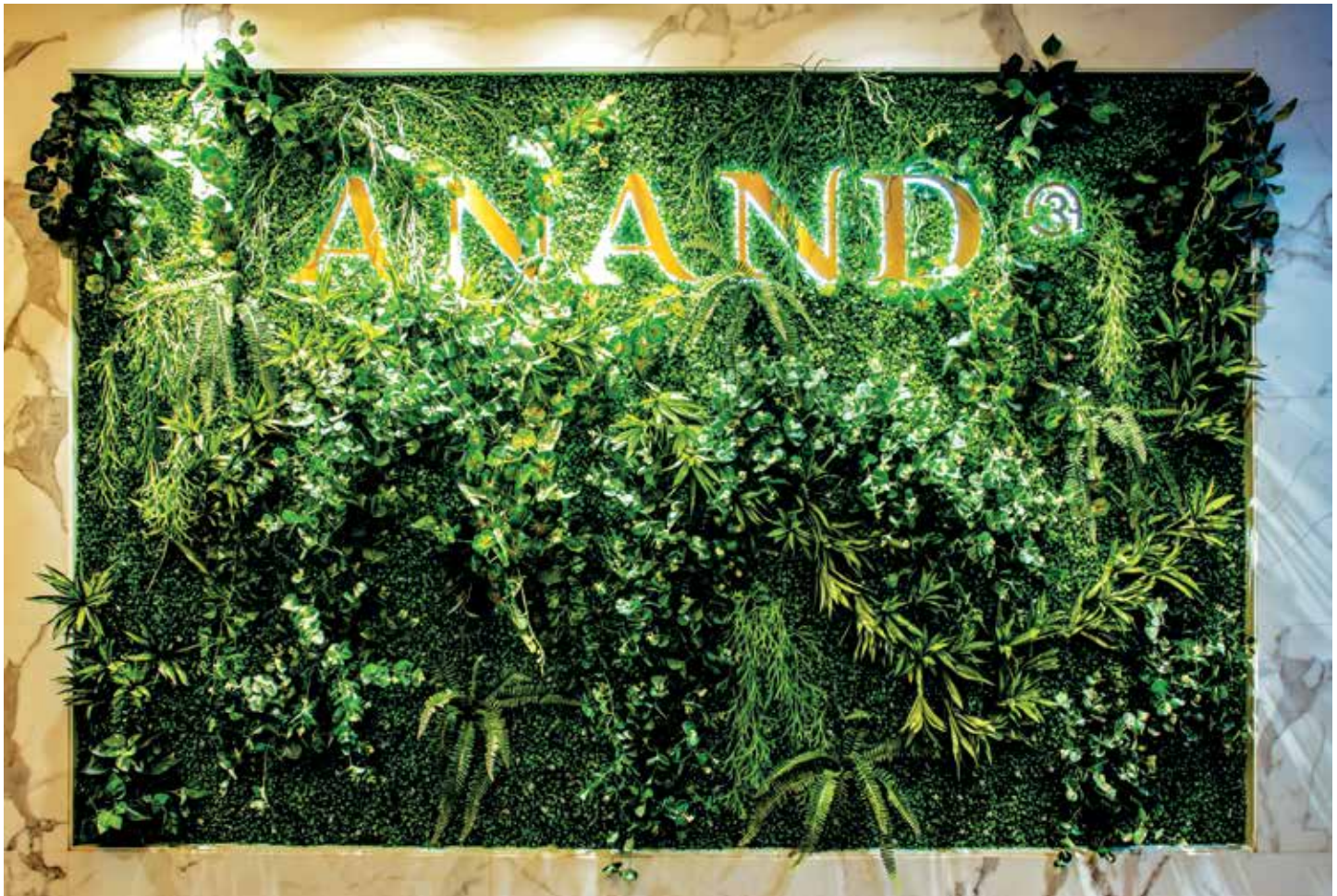
So, to sum up, while the pandemic has made for a challenging 2020, the success of the festive season for retailers may ride on factors like the product categories, the space - on whether they are virtual or store-based, liquidity of their business, their ability to take a lean and mean approach, managing the cost of excess inventory and on choosing the right technology. No matter the circumstances, a positive festive season could well define the way ahead for retailers, and in the process set into motion new retail dynamics.

Mohit Manghani

What to look out for

- Physical retail space redefined towards efficiency, convenience and relevance rather than size
- More green shoots in non metros
- Emergence of dynamic new store formats
- Investments in technology focused on business improvement and measurability
- Omnichannel as a functioning reality
- Expectations of a more collaborative, cost prudent, tech-focused, sustainable and flexible approach from retail solution providers





Flavours of a sweet experience

BANGALORE

Aimed at creating an artful and delightful spatial experience, Anand Sweets, Bangalore, infuses the essence of human experience into the space design. Designed by Delhi-based architecture and design studio RMDK, the space merges the lines dividing contemporary retail and luxury dessert cafes.

Designed in response to the booming café culture in the city, Anand Sweets in Whitefield, Bangalore is a boutique store and restaurant that enlivens the spatial experience. Designed by Delhi based RMDK, the space provides its customers with an indulgent shopping and dining experience.

Dhruva Kalra, Senior Partner, RMDK shares, “The space was envisaged as a young and chic experience that

creates an immersive, sensorial play of different materials. It is heavily influenced by the youth culture and caters to their unique needs. Having a theatrical and glamorous appeal, Anand blurs the lines between contemporary retail, luxury dessert cafes and aesthetic cafes.”

The contemporary space is primarily zoned into the entrance, the boutique retail and a restaurant. The visitor is welcomed by a chirpy

green wall at the entrance with a luxe marble textured frame and a backlit golden toned signage, setting the tone for the overall spatial experience.

“The interiors explore the power of the eccentric colour combination of black, white and gold. It is an intricately detailed space with a symphony of colours, materials and patterns that integrates the entire space into an innovative and



modern ambience. The interiors are a medley of modern colours and textures, cleverly incorporated within the surface finishing, lighting and furniture details,” explains Dhruva.

The boutique retail entrance is marked by a zig zag, black and white marble floor while the restaurant is marked by an artistic

poster of ‘Purani Dilli’, which is a contemporary take on the nostalgia and hustle bustle of the olden markets and eateries.

“The high contrast design language of the retail section subtly transforms within the restaurant to a more relaxed, warm and comfortable ambience. The bright tile patterns and vibrant graphic posters bring



Dhruva Kalra
Senior Partner, RMDK



in the rich visual experience of Old Delhi, reinterpreted into an artful, spirited and aesthetic decor.”

According to Dhruva, the lighting fixtures are focused on the products

and the counters, with different lighting fixtures adorning each functional zone. Narrow Angle Linear Lights are used for linear spaces, while Round Narrow Angle Lights are used for the bigger,

squarish walls. Track lights highlight the smaller spots, the decorative lights are used for counters and big chandeliers are used to create a grand welcome at the entrance.

“The main idea behind the lighting was to create small pockets of highlights that add an accent and a hint of drama to the space. There are no dedicated focus lights used for the entire space, instead the interiors are lit by the spillover lighting from the assortment of lighting fixtures used in different zones,” concludes Dhruva.

Mohit Manghani

Credits

Client

Anand Sweets India

Design Team

Azmat Khan, Sanjay Sah

Counter & Refrigeration

Climaïre

Lighting

Kalinga International



The ‘XCiting’ selfie destination ...

MUMBAI

Crafted by Jumping Goose, the Mumbai-based Tata's Landmark Xcite store is an out and out destination for Gen Z photophiles and Insta-friendly selfies .



Spread across 5,000 sq. ft., the Tata's Landmark Xcite store situated in Mumbai, went through a meticulous retail makeover by Bengaluru-based creative agency; Jumping Goose. The store has been conceptualized with the purpose of engaging people in a creative, youthful bubble through the implementation of Gen Z paraphernalia in its design.

Ekta Saran, Brand Head, Landmark says, "The Tata Landmark Group has always innovated and tested new opportunities. It is a special occasion for us as we introduce an outstanding concept store with Landmark Xcite. Keeping in mind the emerging Gen Z and millennials, this concept store is designed to engage with these target audience for a long term. As we unveil Landmark Xcite, we take another step towards staying committed to our promise of providing unique,



innovative and offbeat experiences to our customers. We are planning to launch three more Landmark Xcite stores by the end of 2020.”

The new store embraces the persona of a wonderland 1000 light years away; where gender, colour, race and stereotypes are non-existent. The concept is brought to life by the ‘bubbly jelly’, the human-like shape-shifters dwelling in the ‘Landmark Universe’.



**Tuhin Roy, Co-founder
Jumping Goose**

Speaking about the design concept, **Umashan Naidoo, Head of Customer, Landmark Xcite** states, “Fun was the big idea when we started designing the store, oriented on the twin axis of innovation and best experience. We decided to be fixated on style, Insta-selfie friendly locations, new experience and super value. Our aim is to consciously add excitement and surprise to everyday using our icon X. We will create a community table that will allow customers to play board games, chill, catch up on trends and discover themselves. The store surely will resonate with the brand’s promise of adding excitement to everyday life.”

Tuhin Roy, Co-founder, Jumping Goose, the design agency, explains the store concept further, “The store and the story is no less than a wonderland. The store is designed around the ideology of providing delightful experience to its young & spirited customers. It will assist them to experience and focus on the merchandise first and flow through the store effortlessly. In order to



stay true to the story and spirit of the brand, it was critical to dive deep and create authentic brand elements, right from material to colour, graphics, lighting, fixtures, signage, props/installations, in-store communication & brand assets.”

To magnify the in-store design and add more focus to the colourful merchandise, the creative agency decided to go for raw concrete walls with a brick highlight on one of its sides. The integration of ceiling and flooring along with the highlighted wall, lends space to quirky props.

The gentle hues of brown and grey are well complimented with the overpowering yellow throughout the store. The bright-coloured props also sync well with the brand’s signage and capture the attention of millennials, making it an ideal destination for Instagram pictures. A thoughtful mix of glossy and matte further revitalizes the element of surprise across the store. Addition of yellow track lines on the floor is a smart way to steer customers’ attention towards the interactive graphics done on walls and other engaging designs.

The glass door at the entrance is embellished with visually-

appealing graphics of shape-shifters and other colourful elements, give an exciting hint of what can be expected inside the store. The brand’s illuminating logo further adds to the vibe of the window.

Speaking about the challenges involved in the design project, Tuhin adds, “Re-branding projects are usually the trickiest and most challenging. This project was both unique and special for us because despite the Covid 19 mayhem and the lockdowns, we were able to deliver the project - right from creating a new brand identity till the new store design & execution, in a record time of about 6 months.”

The agency and its vendor partners got unparalleled support from the Xcite brand team to successfully implement the unconventional design strategies and redefine the identity of the store.

Expressing his gratitude for the design team, Umashan says, “The brightest creative minds partnered with us in the entire conceptual journey. The concepts were developed on the basis of the pen portrait of a digital native; GEN-Z. Right from re-imagining the brand, re-naming it and developing the

mascot to storytelling, brand book and space design & development, this project was an exciting roller coaster ride.”

Ankita Ghosh



Farm fresh in rustic elegance

KARNATAKA

'Organic Mandya' designed by Bengaluru based ARCLAIN Design studio, is an amalgamation of sustainability and modernity, aimed at driving home the value of organic food delivered straight from the farm.

The new store of Organic Mandya, designed by ARCLAIN Design Studio, has been crafted with a vision to offer a world-class design sensibility in a traditional environment steeped in rustic simplicity..

The slate stone on floors and the laterite stone on walls evoke a rural, earthy feel and the strategic placement of wooden fixtures, wood logs and canes escalate the natural ambience of the space. The dark brown stone wall at the reception with a centrally-placed glowing signage completes the earthy feel with a premium ambience. The dash of greenery at every possible corner





Khanjan Patel, Principal Designer & Partner, ARCLAIN
Karun Muthanna, Principal Architect & Partner, ARCLAIN

not only breaks the monotony but also reiterates the tranquility of Nature.

Karun Muthanna, Principal Architect and Partner, ARCLAIN Design Studio, explains, talking about the design process, “Our team understood that the brand personality should reflect the fact that ‘Organic Mandya’ is all about providing a sustainable livelihood to farmers of the region and offering authentic organic food

to its customers. Thus we translated these visions into a space that combines aesthetics, sustainability, innovation and luxury.”

A quiet infusion of different shades of brown in the colour palette holds the rustic essence very well and the lux meter lighting colours create a warm tone that complements the minimalist design. The outdoor installation of the bull and calf replica captures the ethos of

farming and the essence of what the brand stands for.

Speaking about the budget and time involved, Khanjan Patel, Principal Designer and Partner, ARCLAIN Design Studio, states “The team has worked with over 20 retail brands across India, and that experience gave us the foresight to keep the costs low, since a fast-growing brand like ‘Organic Mandya’ should have a budgeted cap. The project deadline was planned to be met within 8 weeks, but due to the pandemic it unfortunately took a bit longer.”

Commenting on the store experience, Madhu Chandan, Founder, Organic Mandya says, “We are receiving thousands of wishes on all social media platforms for the exquisite look of the store which is amazingly executed by the ARCLAIN team.”

Ankita Ghosh



Of chocolates and the senses...

DUBAI

The new flagship store of Godiva, the chocolate maker, in Dubai is an eclectic mix of art that seduces the senses. Designed by The First Ferry, international premium design house, the store personifies what chocolate stands for - a complete sensory indulgence!

When premium chocolate manufacturer Godiva wanted to open a new flagship store in City Centre Mall, Midrif, Dubai, the brief was very precise and evocative. The idea was to provide the store's customers with the ultimate chocolate experience. The brand called on The First Ferry, Dubai-based design company and architecture firm, to enhance the richness of the

design and redefine the experience of visiting a chocolate store.

Prateek Chaudhry, Founder, MD & Skipper of The First Ferry reflects, "The store was to bring to life a three-point mission statement proudly proclaiming Godiva - thrills the senses, sets the gold standard and is irresistibly charming. The challenge was clear: we had to stick to the most vital component of Godiva's design strategy - to always allow

customers to see the chocolate first - yet offer a chic and comfortable store which spoke of style, elegance and grandeur."

The design team used a holistic approach to craft a bespoke flagship store that offers not just the legendary chocolates but a free-flowing design that blends superbly with the spirit of the brand.

"As you wander around this



chocolate lover's paradise, you will notice that the design elements blend perfectly with the store's offerings. We addressed every conceivable angle of the design with due consideration to the aesthetic, functional, maintenance and the eventual life cycle of the store. Each minute detail that adds to the charm of the store was carefully curated and crafted in keeping with the standards," Prateek explains.

As one enters the store, customers are greeted with the enlarged logo of Lady Godiva - a life-size installation - as the starting point. Further, the interiors of the store are accentuated with subtle shades of white and gold trimmings with the chocolate cases adding a dash of colour. The flagship store essentially personifies the richness of the chocolate experience coupled with the unique culture of the land.

Drawing more attention to unique design aspects of the store, Prateek shares, "The circular faux ceiling hovering over the reception offers a visual direction for the customer. The vertical surface is coated with the iconic Godiva gold tiles, which adds to the theme's richness. The



focus is more on the chocolates that are on display. In addition, the store is in harmony with the mall's interiors - a bespoke rendition that displays the fine craftsmanship and blends with the architecture."

Of the challenges, he says, "We had a tight deadline & the project required a keen eye especially in terms of the challenging artistry, which was achieved with the choice of materials and attention to minute details. Godiva was among 53 retailers who were set to open their stores in the Mall before Eid. Only three managed to meet the deadline and The First Ferry acquired the completion certificate before the rest. The First Ferry takes pride in the fact the store is now one of the most favoured destinations for chocolate lovers who visit Dubai."

Mohit Manghani



Project details

Design

The First Ferry

Fitout

The First Ferry - turnkey

Marble

Calcutta super premium

Paint

Berger silk

Lighting

The First Ferry

Furniture

custom. The First Ferry

Artworks

The First Ferry / Godiva

Photography

Zubair Shaikh The First Ferry
Photography



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The art & business of recycled aesthetics

NETHERLANDS

Rotterdam, Netherlands based company Plasticiet specialises in processing large volumes of plastic waste, and transforming it into a sustainable material for various applications. Plasticiet was founded in 2018 by designers Marten van Middelkoop & Joost Dingemans, two Rotterdam based designers with a passion for sustainable material development. The idea for Plasticiet was in fact born during a visit to India on a field trip. In India the designers saw various micro-economies popping up based on local demographic waste streams such as cotton clothes, plastic bottles and metal parts. They saw how local craftsmen in India were able to translate these waste materials into something functional with added value. They also saw how these products were made available for other local industries resulting in revenues for other craftsmen, thus keeping both industries thriving. The designers decided to follow this approach in their work and thus was born Plasticiet.

The company was recently involved in an interiors project for eye wear brand Ace&Tate, for their store in Antwerp, Belgium. The store interior project involved re-purposing tonnes of local plastic waste streams for creating something beautiful. Here's a look.



When designers Marten van Middelkoop & Joost Dingemans, Co-Founders of Plasticiet, were trying to find solutions for people's and industry's disposed plastics, they went back to the idea they studied in India and knew that the outcome should not be a final product. Inspired by the primal beauty and longevity of natural stone they aspired to create a sheet material that would inspire other creators to build objects that can last. To make a waste material appealing they underwent a thorough research on how to give their plastic products a distinct super-natural marbled or terrazzo appearance, for as they say, "if the material isn't beautiful it won't sustain". And this is the approach they took for Ace&Tate's Antwerp store too.

One of the first things that the Plasticiet team did when they took up the the Antwerp Ace & Tate store in Antwerp, Belgium, was to analyse the local demographic plastic waste streams, asking questions like - what are they, where do these plastics come from, what stories do they hold and how can they be of added value again in Antwerp? Plasticiet found a collaboration with Suez who collect bulky domestic products in the local periphery. These broken and discarded products that were likely used by visitors were crushed to be reused again instore in the centre of Antwerp.

"So instead of wasting it, we said let's turn it in something beautiful, which is exactly what we love to do at Plasticiet. With a visual language inspired by the primal beauty of natural stone, we create building blocks that can be used for a wide range of applications," says Joost Dingemans, Co-Founder, Plasticiet.

"We worked closely together with Lili de Goede, who at that moment



was one of the interior designers at Ace And Tate. She was very enthusiastic towards the style of our exhibition presented at Design District and Interieur BE back in 2018, so we wanted to keep that vibe alive. Next to that the store needed to tell a story so we decided we wanted to use local waste of Antwerp, not just because it might be recognizable for the residents but also because of Ace And Tate's aspiration to grow into a more sustainable business. With these things in mind we wanted to create a calm, serene space combined with the booming colours that they love at the glass wear brand," says Joost Dingemans.

The recycled plastic used for the Ace&Tate store in Antwerp is polyethylene, a most common material that finds many uses in industrial and construction appliances as well as domestic products such as food packaging, kitchen ware and toys. All the coloured chunks visible in the store are collected from the bulky waste of Antwerp's periphery separated from other types of plastic by a machine developed by Suez who partnered with the company for the project.

"The polyethylene was shredded to large pieces that were hand sorted in red, blue and orange, colours that are often used in the visual expression of Ace&Tate's stores. Compared to the white base material – which used to be food packaging – the reclaimed plastic from Antwerp becomes less fluid allowing the pieces to retain their shape in the melting process," explains Joost. For the cladding, arches, counters and sink Plasticiet recycled near 1000 kilograms of plastic.

Joost further explains talking about the need to recycle, "Each kilogram of recycled plastic avoids around 1,2kg of carbon emission compared to virgin material. By applying it instore the recycled plastic finds a long term home and can be recycled again in the future. We want



to inspire others to find long term appliances for materials that are reusable or recyclable rather than misusing the world's precious materials by readily disposing of them."

N. Jayalakshmi

‘Slowly but surely durable sustainable alternatives will conquer’

Joost Dingemans, Co-founder - Plasticiet, shares with VMRD some more thoughts on the Ace&Tate's store project and on the feasibility of taking the sustainable approach in retail.



Joost Dingemans (Right), Co-founder - Plasticiet, with the other co-founder Marten van Middelkoop.

Any specific challenges you faced while executing the Ace&Tate store project with recycled plastic?

The biggest challenges were to create a calm and serene environment with a material that screams with vivid and lively colours. We did this by approaching it as if we were designing a modern version of a classic church. With that in mind we used the repetition of the arches and made everything come together as a whole with easily recognisable shapes to give room to the material and give it a voice. The other challenge was to approve it for fire resistance. There is only so much you can apply on a wall without the authorities declining the material as a wall covering. We had to work our ways around that and thus apply less on the walls and ceilings than we wanted.

What is the cost implication for this kind of a sustainable store design project? You know there's a perception that it's more cost intensive. What would you say to that?

Compared to other decorative high-end sheet materials that are not sustainable, our material is actually around the same price or even less costly. Next to that, we designed it ourselves so we could take into account all the aspects and properties of the materials that others might not know because we have the experience of working with our own material, so we could offer the design for a lower price too.

It's interesting to note that the idea for Plasticiet came during a visit to India. Yet, at a bigger level, sustainability is not really a common

phenomenon where store design is concerned in the country. How do you think it can move into the mainstream space of store designs? Should the call come from store designers or from the retailers themselves?

When we started out in the art academy, sustainability in the broadest sense was still brand new in our school and there were no courses, classes or anything relatable until later in our studies. We both had a keen interest in this by ourselves already. Now years later it has caught on tremendously; there are multiple similar companies providing sustainable alternatives to the classic materials we all have come to know and love. I think it is now almost impossible to start a new business without taking true sustainability into account. Slowly but surely durable and sustainable alternatives will conquer the classics and retailers are almost forced to join the movement. The call will come from both the designer and the store owners/brands as stores are reliable on trends. This is a trend you cannot deny, and will be here to stay for a long future to come.





Italian Renaissance comes alive

ITALY

Russian designers Mors Architects designed the factory showroom for Italian furniture company LAS, by drawing on the spirit of Italian Renaissance, and in the process expressing the persuasiveness of art that the brand showroom symbolizes.



For Mors Architects, the starting point to design the LAS factory showroom was, as the company says, the fact that LAS treats cabinetwork as an art. Each item can serve as a quality standard of office furniture. So the designers created interiors that were inspired by the works of the Italian Renaissance “as a symbol of the changeover to a self-centered world and the perception of man in all his entirety. The man and his comfort are paramount in designing furniture in LAS”.

Says Vitaliy Zemlyanskiy / Chief Executive Officer Mors Architects, “We visited the factory LAS, and saw the attention which the masters pay to details while assembling some exclusive positions by hands. We thought that it looked like an expression of Italian culture. So we wanted to emphasize the brand’s ownership of art, which for centuries had a wonderful spiritualizing impact on world culture. We sincerely hope that the visitors of the showroom will feel the atmosphere and imbibe our idea.”

In order to create the look and feel of a Modern Art gallery several exhibition light volumes were highlighted in the dark interior. Sculptures of the famous Renaissance artists were selected as a background for each



of them, and thus LAS furniture becomes part of the fine work which is accentuated by the author's signature. "We seem to look at the history of art through the lens of modernity using color lines-accents on the views," as the Mors statement points out.

Speed of delivery, decision-making and customer interaction Speed are some of the hallmarks of LAS and these are made to reflect in the various design elements using a variety of concepts. For example, speed is directly related to time, so the design team chose the circle prototype — "a perfect form, symbolizing the cyclicity of time and the speed of movement", as they point out. The round element from the tunnel mirror in the central part of the interior conveys the dynamics of the company's development.

N. Jayalakshmi





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Window to a festive spirit

It's that time of the year once again and whatever we may have experienced this year, nothing can stop us from rejoicing in the spirit of festivities that this time of the year brings on. And no better place than retail to witness it. Here's a look at some shop windows that have gone out to dispel the pandemic gloom and kick in the spirit of the upcoming festivals.

Reliance Trends' eclectic Dussehra theme

Reliance Trends' 'Pujo' and 'Dussehra' themed windows are already delighting onlookers and spreading cheer with their celebratory spirit.

Leading lifestyle retail chain Reliance Trends' latest window displays reflect myriad cultures, preserving the essence of the Dussehra festivities. Through bright and striking designs, the brand aims at creating an impactful visual experience for the passers-by and shoppers.

The brand implemented a sundry approach in executing designs in different regions, as per the prevailing culture. They adopted a 'Pujo' based theme for the window displays in West Bengal and some parts of North-east, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha, whereas 'Dussehra' is used as a theme to embellish windows of the stores

in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Apart from the diverse execution, the colour palette has been the same for all the windows. The accurate amalgamation of yellow, orange and tinge of red creates a warm aura. Another highlight is the sparkle prop used on the window



floor. It is crafted with rays of gold mirror acrylic and LED strips that give an illusion of crackers.

The background consists of 7.5 ft. long colorful arches made out of acrylic and LED strips, illuminating the display and enhancing the look and feel of the window. The real show stealer though is the circular logo in the center adorned with bulbs.

The use of props such as 'chandmala' and 'alpana' on the glass pane adds to the quintessentially traditional vibe of Bengal, thereby making it a perfect fit to the 'Pujo' display. Further, the elephant designs evocative of Mysore reflect the hues of the forthcoming 'Bathukamma' in the 'Dussehra' display. The addition of small markers depicting Puja/ Dussehra defines the look and feel of the window overall.

The visual merchandisers successfully executed the window display at more than 500 stores in the pandemic, overcoming the barriers of transporting long arches in small parts and fixing them on-spot, to avoid breakage. The use of small elements infuses a dynamic vibe in each of the windows.



Shoppers Stop's ode to the Goddess

Shoppers Stop has exhibited their grand and larger than life 'Pujo' window display in 12 stores across West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Jharkhand and New Delhi.



Shoppers Stop's new festive themed windows are a carefully created tribute to all that the Durga Pooja stands for.

Pawan Nagarwal, CCA and Head VM, Shoppers Stop says talking about it, "The company envisaged revealing the spirit of pure celebration through their visual merchandising display and offering a joyful experience of 'Pujo' pandals in the current situation where there is restriction against on-ground pandals."

The window is ornamented with an exquisite blend of red and golden, delineating the essence of 'sindoor khela' and portraying the power of Goddess Durga. The dominant golden colour lifts up the striking features in the window, thereby drawing people's attention towards it.

"We wanted to capture its true essence with bright colors and lights. The idea was to ensure the flavor of the same through our extravagant



displays that looked magnificent from far and near," Pawan adds.

The big, golden mandala with fine

details and rotating lights in the backdrop; signify the brilliance of Goddess Durga, while the addition of a golden marker symbolize good



wishes for the approaching festival. The infusion of golden lotus flowers denotes the 108 names of the Goddess and the amalgamation of the merchandise used on mannequins, suggests the festive ensembles that people wear when they visit pandals.

Gold podium risers are used to highlight the products that can be coordinated and cross-merchandised with footwear, bags, and jewelry and also suggest gifting ideas. Special pixel lights set across the window width sharpen the brightness and add a hint of drama.

Commenting on the overall look, Pawan explains, “In entirety, the window provides our customers with the excitement of being in an actual Durga Puja pandal. The materials and techniques used are simple and cost-effective factoring in the pandemic situation, thus optimizing the cost and fabrication techniques. The backdrop is a red damask design and it is curated in the spirit of the festival. The lotus is created with the help of a unique technique that uses heat to bend the sun-board sheets to achieve a petal-like shape.”

The window surpassed all challenges and was successfully executed with the combined effort of the design team and local vendors from every city.

Lifestyle greets Durga Pujo in style

Lifestyle International pays tribute to ‘Durga Pujo’ in an iconic manner to connect with the audience in the East.





Landmark Group's Lifestyle International Pvt. Ltd. has showcased their eco-friendly 'Pujo' window to connect with the shoppers in Eastern India by immersing the displays in the most iconic elements of the celebration.

Akash Kumar, VM Head, Lifestyle International Pvt. Ltd., says talking about it, **"Keeping our promise to go complete eco-friendly from the last festive season, we have installed the 'Pujo' window in a more sustainable manner."**

The simple yet trendy window is festooned with natural materials as per the company's objective. The use of larger-than-life lotus patterns is a wonderful representation of purity, prosperity and divinity. The beautiful face of the idol made of shola; a material extracted from a pith of plant, amidst the lotus in the backdrop lends a sacred vibe to the window. The intricate detailing done on the structure protrudes true craftsmanship and is a treat for the eyes.

"This window not only promotes the Dussehra theme of the victory of good over evil, but is also an attempt at victory over environmental degradation. Like last year, this time too we tried to keep our carbon footprints as minimum as possible on the visual merchandising elements by



working with sustainable materials and utilizing local artisans," Akash added.

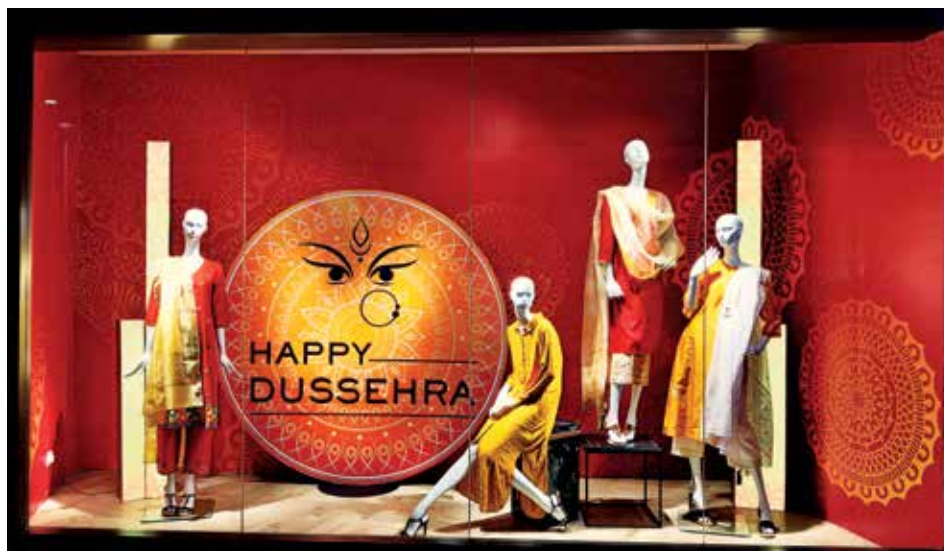
The delightful control over colour temperature creates an optical perception of layers of lotus petals coming out of the window. The vignette lighting effect magnifies the small decorative features of the idol, enhancing its glory even more. An accurate amalgamation of golden and white along with a tinge of blue in the background adds to the persona of the window and makes

it look visually vibrant. The small golden lotus flowers on the floor further enhance the essence of the festivities.

The design team breathed new life into the window with the help of 'Inchworm Creation'. Although the cost incurred in making the window was 20% more than the usual price, the accomplishment of executing an entire window with minimum carbon footprint, has been a satisfying experience for the team.

Project Eve keeps up the extravagant flavours

All the rich layers of the Dussehra and Durga Puja festivals are brought alive in Project Eve's festive windows.



The joyous spirit of both Durga Puja and Dussehra is beautifully captured in Project Eve's new festive windows. The objective of the display was to capture the dressed for occasion shopping for Dussehra (South) and Durga Pujo (East) and the concept of the window design is based on the philosophy of the brand.

Unni Augustine, VM Head at Project Eve says, sharing the details, "A large Durga form was created as the prime prop, which depicted richness and festivity of the display. Linear

lights of different sizes on the sides enhanced & completed the display, the festive backdrop added to the overall festive mood of the season."

Designed by the in-house VM team of Project Eve, the Pujo concept has been introduced at a Pan India level. "While the window conveys the festive flavour of the season, the merchandise communication also highlights the festive wear collection. The prime prop of the window display is a Durga, crafted on medium density fireboard with vinyl layering, while the linear lights are made up of

acrylic casing on tubelights wrapped under vinyl," explains Unni.

The window has been executed at selected key stores across cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar and Guwahati. The brand partnered with vendors like Shreeram Display system, Sri Siddhi Sai Inc. & Ad Edge for the South & East festive windows.

Credits

VM Head

Unni Augustine

Creative design

Aarti Shegaonkar

Merchandise Styling

Manish Ranjan, Sanika Pimple & Shenaz Sheikh

Mohit Manghani & Ankita Ghosh



Can smart store fit-outs enable better business?

In the times that we live in, with unprecedented challenges and economic dynamics at play, the retail business needs prudent investments and calculated risks to get back on the growth path. Investments in technologies such as smart fixtures, if done right, could be one sure fire way of getting there.



The Engage Fit N Light phygital fixture developed by INSYNC Shop Fittings
Pic Courtesy: INSYNC Shop Fittings

Picture this. You walk into a life style accessories store. You browse around and as you stop in front of a rack displaying footwear and your eyes scan the merchandise, a quietly friendly message pops up on a sleek little screen, goading you into trying out one of those. And voila! The screen relays everything you need to know about the shoes - price, material, offers, why even other accessories that could go with it. All without it being intrusive, pushy or in the face.

Enhancing the human factor

Well, whoever said shopping was therapeutic, could have added that it was more so when aided by the right shop assistant and in this case, the shop assistant just happens to be digital! Indeed, technology today is more than just good-to-have, it is must-have when you take into account all that it can drive in the long run - customer engagement and loyalty, efficiency and most importantly, long term cost savings.

For thenaysayers of digital technology who argue that technology cannot replace the human touch, here 's a flash news - technology actually enhances the human quotient. First, the right solution can in fact play an empathetic role, gauging shopper tastes and accordingly offer the right information, and secondly, investment in these digital assistants



A smart fixture can serve multiple purposes as this fitout developed for Madame by INSYNC Shop Fittings shows.
Pic Courtesy: INSYNC Shop Fittings

- smart technologies embedded in the store fixtures - can actually free up the store staff to play a more meaningful role with the customers. So on both counts, there is a value-added enhancement in the in-store experience.

Making the spends count

Now comes the question of fetching returns from investments in technologies such as smart shelves and fixtures. The answer lies in whether you are looking at it long term or short term.

According to a Forbes article on how technology will transform shopping In 2020, Internet of Things (IoT) and Smart Equipment will be the key drivers of change as the volumes of data that will be made available can offer a highly personalised experience to consumers and

offer them information that helps them in better decisions. Thus smart equipment such as sensor embedded shelves that also track inventory can in fact redefine the retail business. Also, a white paper called 'The 2nd era of digital retail -A vision for the future of shopping and the smart shelf' brought out by Intel Labs and The Store WPP, a core part of the digital transformation and disruption happening in the retail sector, is the smart shelf that can facilitate conversation between the brands and shoppers and actively participate in the selling process.

Also, a Gartner report called 'Hype Cycle for Retail Technologies, 2019,' puts smart shelf technologies right among the top in the 'On the Rise' category, and in esteemed company - Contextualized Real-Time Pricing, Blockchain in Retail and Smart Check-Out!

Thus the returns from investing in connected technologies such as smart shelves and fixtures are essentially long term and they work at many levels:

- Rich mine of shopper data
- Better business intelligence from data harvesting
- More engaging and personalised customer experience through value added product/brand information resulting in better optimisation of per sq ft revenues
- Better inventory management and reduced wastage through real time stock tracking
- Better utilisation of utilities such as power resulting in smarter management of OPEX

Smart is what smart does

Says Huzefa Merchant, Founder, INSYNC Shop Fittings (SAFE ENTERPRISES), which specialises in IoT enabled smart fit-outs, explaining the importance of smart fixtures in the context of their own products,



"Our smart fixture solutions rest on three pillars - better visibility, deeper engagement and higher sales. Better visibility comes from the integrated and efficient lighting offered in our fixture solutions. This ensures twice the output produced from traditional lighting. Also, since the lighting is done strategically, it not only results in day light effect with no glare, but also helps reduce the number of ceiling lights to be used, leading to lesser power consumption and significant long term cost savings."



A smart fixture can also aid in better sales. Fitout developed for brand Mochi by INSYNC Shop Fittings
Pic Courtesy: INSYNC Shop Fittings

Explaining the other factors, he adds, “Also, we provide still signage that is integrated with the rack, along with modular digital signage with video content, all in line with the product, thus providing deeper engagement with the customers.”

These fixture solutions offered by INSYNC also come integrated with aroma dispensers which ensures that all the senses are engaged experientially. As Huzefa says, a smart fixture, by ensuring meaningful shopper engagement through value added experience and information, can result in increased dwell leading to higher sales. Also, as he points out, a smart IoT enabled fixture helps in cross selling and up-selling by offering related and relevant information to shoppers regarding other products in the store.

“According to a PwC report, 37 % of shoppers in India and 40% of shopper globally say better product information equates to higher experiential value in the store. So essentially from smart fixtures you get data combined with business intelligence with which you can better optimise the store inventory. Smart fitouts in fact make the entire retail supply chain smart.”

It would thus seem the returns are pretty self evident when it comes to investing in these smart technologies. And yet the perception of high cost associated with it on the part of the retail clients is a tough nut to crack. Huzefa says in this regard, “People think it’s expensive because it looks expensive, but the fact is that our solution is completely designed, developed and produced in India, so we are able to optimise the cost. Now there is also a perception that being inexpensive means compromising on quality. But our products go through multiple third party certification for quality. Also, we are not a fabricating company; we are a shop fitting research and development company and our entire system is like an assembly chain, so our production methodology is very agile.”

Well, the good news is that there are in fact retail clients and industry experts who see the value in investing in these smart technologies. Says **Surender Gnanaolivu, Sr Consultant - Retail Experience**, speaking about the INSYNC fixture solutions, “I think they are very meaningful for retailers & brands to get future-ready and to help consumers have a frictionless experience in stores. They have a great combination of

engineering and technology. I think what they have is something that can be readily used not only by large retailers, but by just any retailer.”

Dharmendra Sharma, Head- Projects at Universal Sportsbiz Pvt Ltd, agrees, “I really like the concept, new technologies, and smart innovative products Insync has introduced. We are surely looking to use these products in our upcoming brands.”

Well, it’s just a matter of time before the number of retail brands who see the value in investing in these smart solutions increases. For, to go back to the Intel Labs - The Store WPP report, “A smart shelf can fulfill a much more active role where it understands shopper needs and can participate more fully in the selling process. For manufacturers, a smart shelf can create data-led sales and marketing opportunities. It can also maximize profit for the retailer by optimizing pricing dynamically, and enable manufacturers and retailers to reward shopper loyalty, all at the shelf edge.” Well, this just about sums it up, doesn’t it?

N. Jayalakshmi



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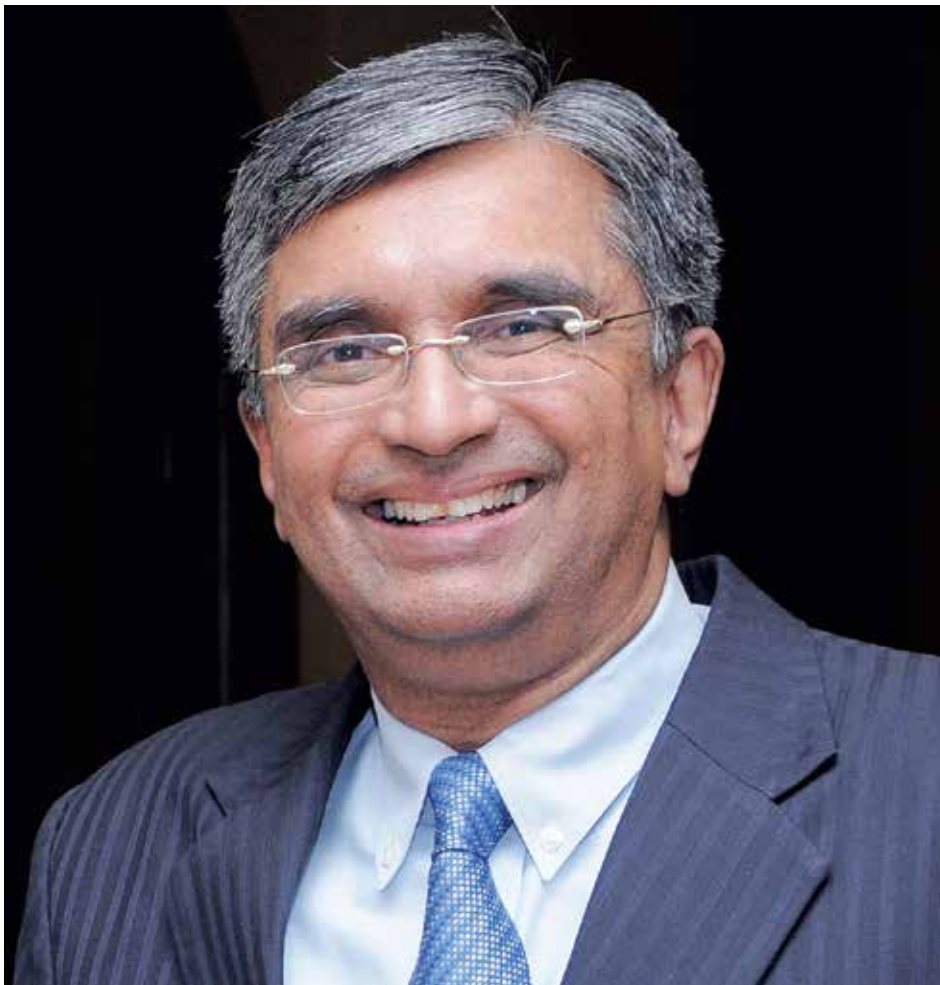
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'Wanted: Tech solutions that are affordable & easily adaptable for retail'

*Bengaluru based startup ReCast Technology recently launched a browser-based web-app 'MallStreet' to bring popular stores to consumer homes via live video. The platform integrates the sensory & social gratification of in-store shopping & houses prominent stores across diverse categories. In a special interaction with VMRD, **Jayesh Chakravarthi, CEO and Co-Founder - ReCast Technology**, shares how MallStreet helps retailers deal with retail bottlenecks and speaks about technology trends that will reshape future of retail and more.*



Jayesh Chakravarthi, CEO & Co-Founder, ReCast Technology

Can you take us through some factors and market drivers that preceded the launch of 'MallStreet'?

MallStreet was conceived a year ago in the backdrop of diminishing footfall in brick & mortar stores in Bengaluru and across the country. The objective was to drive virtual footfall to stores through 'Live Video Commerce'. The idea is predicated on research findings - that consumers like the social experience of physical shopping. However, the bottlenecks arising out of traffic, lack of parking spaces & diminishing availability of disposable time, discourage them from making a trip to a high street or a mall.

Using MallStreet, to video interact with a favourite store and make a purchase, provides the shopper, the much-needed social interaction, along with the convenience of doing it from his/her home. The arrival of the pandemic gave additional impetus to this need as, 'contactlessness' or reduced contact interaction became an additional requirement.

MallStreet offers the shopper the best-of-both-worlds, social interaction with the contactlessness, while shopping.

Who are the brands that you have tied up with?

We have tied-up with corporate brand franchises like Nike, Levis, Raymonds, Jockey, Casio, Peter England, Louis Philippe, Red Tape and others.

How does the tool help retailers and retail brands? And how does it help brands define personalized experiences at scale?

Popular retailers in a city or town with well-known identity/brand no longer need to restrict themselves to hyper-local business. Shoppers can reach them virtually both from within the city & for that matter anywhere else in the world. MallStreet will provide them the “appendages” to execute a sale.

While the transaction is online, like in Ecommerce, the big difference is that the identity of the store is preserved and even enhanced by MallStreet. No longer will on-line sale suffer the disadvantage of the product being visible while the identity of the store is subsumed, as is the case today.

Brands that are already national or even global can embed the MallStreet engine into their online portal, as an added component to their omni-channel strategy. Consumers visiting the brand’s website now have an additional channel – of video calling the brand’s store anywhere in the city/country & engaging in Live Commerce.

Were there any specific challenges you faced while executing MallStreet?

The challenges are two, one relating to the retailers, and the other to the consumers/shoppers. ‘Change Management’ though cliched, is the biggest challenge with retailer - their ability to adopt to digital technology and new ways of doing business. MallStreet’s contribution towards facilitating this change is to make the technology 100% plug & play and frictionless.

On the consumer side the big question was: will shoppers change their buying behaviour and adopt to a hybrid experience such as the one provided by MallStreet? But the onset of the pandemic, on top of existing challenges faced by city dwellers, such as infrastructural bottlenecks etc., has created a ‘new normal’ that encourages Live Commerce.

Going ahead, do you see investments by retail brands in omnichannel and front-end digital technologies going up? What specific trends do you see there?

Investment in omni-channel, by brick & mortar stores and brands is inevitable. Early adapters are likely



Investment in omni-channel, by brick & mortar stores and brands is inevitable.

Early adapters are likely to minimise risk of petering sales and diminishing footfall. Speed is the key here. Brick & mortar retail will not die. That does not mean that all the components that define the segment will survive.”

to minimise risk of petering sales and diminishing footfall. Speed is the key here. Brick & mortar retail will not die. That does not mean that all the components that define the segment will survive. The stand-alone and local brands are more susceptible to the changing environment & consumer behaviour. They need to hedge their risk by investing in digital technology. It should become part of their basic infrastructure such as physical space, WiFi, PoS System etc.

So, does that mean that moving forward, in the retail space, we can see greater collaborations with technology solution providers?

A lot depends on the technology solution providers to be a catalyst to this process. They need to offer solutions, that are affordable and easily adaptable for retail.

The retail segment is fragmented and cannot afford to create and sustain its own proprietary digital solutions. Believing and committing to a shared, co-operative model is essential, such as a SaaS (Software as a Service) solution, which is what MallStreet is based on. Retail brands that have the current generation entrepreneurs at the helm of affairs have a greater chance of success.

So what would it take for a front-end retail solution to really make a meaningful difference to a retail brand and translate into tangible returns?

1. The solution should be inexpensive, with low initial investment and payable on usage (like WiFi usage)
2. It should be plug & play – easy to use & of low complexity
3. It should function independent of the store/brand’s CRM/PoS systems
4. The solution provider should nurture a medium to long-term mindset. Change will be slow.

Moving forward, do you think physical spaces will get redefined?

Indeed. One can conceive of a ‘Dark Store’ – a concept where a store with all its trappings (best interior, lighting, display etc.) is created centrally in any part of the country. The store will have well-trained sales executives and fashionistas. Cameras on gimbals, tripods, robotic arm will display the product authentically and in its best form to shoppers who call-in on video. Once the shopper selects an item, it would be shipped from the nearest available outlet to the buyer.

Such a concept will spawn a new set of roles – specialists, fashion consultants, as well as adoption of technologies such as VR (Virtual reality) & AR (Augmented reality) to enable virtual trials.

Any projections you would like to share regarding the retail technology industry itself?

The industry is a behemoth approaching a trillion dollar in market size. It is expected that:

- The sector will continue to grow at 8 to 10%, a healthy growth given its large base
- There will be significant migration of stores from the unorganized sector to the organized one (organized sector today accounts for only 10-12% of the overall sector)
- The smaller store & brands will be the most vulnerable (the proverbial frog that is in a water-pot & does not realise that it is being slowly but inexorably boiled to death.)
- Digital technology & 5G can transform the way business is done in the retail industry

Mohit Manghani

‘Physical stores will become hubs for knowledge sharing & brand credibility’

Furniture and home décor mall Creaticity recently launched its first e-commerce portal www.creaticityonline.com - in the home & decor Segment. Seamlessly combining both physical and digital aspects of shopping, this marks the mall's inclusive foray into omnichannel retailing.

*In a special with interaction with VM&RD, **Mahesh M, CEO - Creaticity**, shares how phygital journey can help grow businesses, and offers some key advice to retailers adopting omnichannel solutions.*



Could you explain the background to Creaticity's recently launched ecommerce platform? What were the key market drivers?

We live in a time when we are all mostly indoors and it's not surprising that home makers want to give their spaces that much-needed boost of warmth and comfort. Well, there's good news for those who prefer to shop from the comfort and safety of their homes. It's the 'phygital' shopping experience that Creaticity is making possible, for the first time in Indian home & living category and in the bustling city of Pune to begin with. The key drivers are the rapidly changing customer behavior, including: (1) Rise in online shopping even for discretionary goods such as furniture (2) A Need for safe and contactless shopping and (3) The expectations of a seamless experience across channels.

How does this platform work? And how does it help brands to define personalized experiences at scale?

This platform provides intelligent



shopping for the smart buyer. Imagine entering a virtual mall that lets you browse nearly 5000 products and 50 brands spread across 20+ product categories – all this, paired with a sensible and innovative user experience. One can take a 360-degree virtual tour (of actual store) for experiential buying – which means you can view the different physical stores present at Creaticity. The AI-powered buying feature is both unique and convenient because it helps the shopper transition from offline to online buying and taking assistance of store representatives through an online chat. An exciting CRM tool which we fondly call BEAGLE is aligned such that the retailers can be assigned the leads originating from the e-comm portal which can then be logically followed up for conversion. So, personalisation is achieved at various stages of pre-sales, in-sales and post sales.

What kind of challenges did you face while executing this portal at such a large scale?

We were very clear that we wish to combine the heart of physical and the head of digital for a complete personalised experience with Creaticity, Pune, as they bring the mall to the mobile (and of course the other way too!). We faced three specific challenges, at least in the initial stages. A. The lockdown limitations from a personal coordination angle, B. Assimilation of product data in a prescribed format from nearly 50 brands in super-short time and C. Alignment of the entire value chain from a solution perspective. Despite all of these, and coupled with managing the re-opening of the physical mall

almost at the same time, we turned around the entire project in 55 days.

What are some of your key observations in the way retail brands are investing in omnichannel/phygital solutions? Do you see technology playing a greater role going ahead?

I believe it is a two-way street – customers want a unified experience and brands/retailers want single-view of their customer so that they can personalize the content even more.

Going ahead, omnichannel journeys will be conceptualized and implemented, channels will be integrated, the role of salespeople will get redefined, the role and relevance of physical store will be transformed to experience centers enriched with technology. Technology will now be a mega-tool to all of us as it will enable us to deliver superior customer experience, accelerate the process of conversions through distinct differentiation, build delight to end-consumer via the experience and differentiation and of course the improved analytics will aid in hyper-personalisation.

What in your observations are some common misgivings that retailers face while opting for an omnichannel solution? What would be your advice to them?

To me, an omnichannel solution covers six aspects: Integration of price, product, promotions and order fulfilment are the easier parts of the puzzle which most brands and retailers are comfortable in implementing. Integration of customer transaction, information and history and giving

integrated information access to the customers are still challenges. The struggle is in terms of the ability to capture and collate intelligent and meaningful data pertaining to the above aspects. Finally the aspect of service delivery poses challenges in terms of consistency across the omnichannel journey. As an avid researcher in the area of omnichannel retail, I could add that complete integration of the various touchpoints and melding the benefits of these channels to deliver a superior and seamless experience is a retailer's wishlist. I would strongly urge retailers to begin with questioning which aspects of the above integration are truly needed to improve their performance and then focus strictly only on those aspects. Returns on investment in technology can be justified by the value proposition delivered along with tangible revenue and profitability growth.

Moving forward, do you think physical spaces will get redefined?

The new normal will force retailers to revisit their physical store strategies in terms of size and purpose. Physical stores will become centres for sharing knowledge and building credibility of the brand. In-store Technology tools like touch screen kiosks, navigation apps, QRcodes, RFID, magic mirrors, virtual trial rooms, all of these and much more will become store atmospheric elements. The sensory experience earlier provided by music, lighting and fragrances will be augmented (maybe even dominated) by in-store technology. Smart technologies will become more prevalent including lighting, price talkers and shelf edge labels, availability alerts and so on. And all these technologies will be continuously churning out data for rich analytics on consumer behaviour. Remember, journeys are as non-linear as we can imagine.

What are your own plans for the immediate future? Any new investments, phygital/omnichannel solutions you are looking at?

Our omnichannel strategy blueprint has been in the making since the last year. The e-com initiative takes us one step closer to our customers in offering them a seamless shopping experience. Going forward, we will work towards integrating finer aspects of the journey including design solutions, knowledge-sharing and our services platform that covers maintenance and upkeep of the home furniture.

Mohit Manghani

Stores are back with a vengeance; are shoppers too?

Lifestyle, Taneira, Mango, Nykaa, V Mart, Uniqlo, Malabar Gold..the list of brands opening new stores is pretty long. What is also interesting is that many of these brands are entering newer markets, and opening flagship stores in newer cities. Lifestyle for example has expanded its footprint in the North-East India by opening its first flagship store at Aurus Mall in Guwahati. The three-storeyed store is 31,000 sq. ft. wide and offers a wide variety of national and international brands.

And then the youngest brand of Titan, Taneira, launched its first store at Express Avenue Mall in Chennai. The store is spread across 1400 sq. ft. and houses an assortment of traditionally fashionable clothing. Mango for its part will open a new store at Infiniti mall in

Mumbai with expansions plans lined up in Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Jaipur, Ludhiana and New Delhi. It has also planned to open standalone stores in Hyderabad, Surat and Lucknow. What is also interesting is the detailed VM and other visual elements that these stores are focusing on. The new Lifestyle store for instance does the longest hand-drawn manuscript painting of Assam along with other colourful elements. Going by all these it would seem that lockdowns are from a distant era. But the bigger question is: will shoppers go back to their old shopping ways and do justice to these efforts by retailers. It would seem that the bigger and more critical need would be to reinstate trust and confidence among shoppers and communicate the various safety measures being followed in the retail space. This would mean continuous communications both in-store and digitally.



Omnichannel goes omnipresent... but then what?

Just a couple of years ago 'omnichannel' seemed like the latest buzz word doing the rounds among retail analysts and forecasters. Today any retail brand worth its product wears the word on its sleeve... er.. label, making it a given. The pandemic has only accelerated the thrust on omnichannel investments. Retail major Ikea for example has announced that it will adopt an omnichannel approach to expand in India, with plans to open 25 stores in nine Indian cities, by 2025. The Swedish furniture retailer plans to fortify its network with the introduction of omnichannel approach after expansion slows down in India, due to the ongoing pandemic. According to Peter Betzel, CEO, IKEA India, "It is important



to have a clear communication in all our channels to our customers as many are depending on online product descriptions, customer testimonials, quality standards, usability, etc to make a purchase decision. As many potential customers are first time digital users, we want to support them in their online journey.” At the ReTechCon ONLINE 2020, event organized by RAI, retailers also emphasized on the growing role of technology, adopting digital & contactless solutions and new business strategies around unified commerce, an integral part of the omnichannel approach.

Further, a joint report by industry body Assocham and Primus Partners has said that the Indian retail industry is expected to be driven by data-led opportunities and artificial intelligence and that the role of offline stores is likely to change, focusing on experience and collection, and also that consumers, to avoid crowds, would prefer to ‘buy and pay online, maybe pick-up in-store’, as a way of stepping out of their homes. Of course none of this is news to us. But the bigger question is how well retailers and their solution partners can see through the entire omnichannel journey and how it plays

out once the dust of the pandemic settles down. No doubt habits are hard wired, and shoppers now used to the comforts of omnichannel shopping, would be averse to going back to the era of endless checkout queues and crowded aisles. But shoppers are also dynamic, unpredictable entities and retail itself is an ever evolving space. For omnichannel investments to make sense in the long run, it would require investing in technologies that can stand the test of time and stay good through all the shifting market trends.

Are we seeing the era of smart partnerships?

If one could scan some of the recent headlines from the retail world, it would seem that partnerships and collaborations are the flavour of the season. Retailers, food brands and restaurants tying up with delivery apps are now passe. The collaboration trend now includes players across the spectrum. One very expected trend is of course that of brands partnering with technology companies.

Wildcraft India Pvt. for example, recently announced its collaboration with technology major IBM for the implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) as-a-service-platform to increase customer assistance and enhance consumer experience.

The 360-degree view solution is created by IBM Services with Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning (ML) capabilities and will help the company offer a customized shopping experience across all channels. In another instance, Avon, one of world’s leading direct selling beauty companies, announced that it will deploy o9’s next-generation platform to facilitate Integrated Business Planning (IBP) and Control Tower (S&OE) processes to drive data-driven decision making.

Another interesting example is that of Titan joining forces with State Bank of India to launch contactless payment watches and bring innovation and added safety in the retail space. The SBI account holders can now tap on the watch and pay at the counter without the need of swiping or inserting their SBI card. Such technology focused partnerships are of course inevitable given that most brands are increasingly depending on technology to deliver results across the value chain. What will be particularly interesting to watch will be how these partnerships play out in the retail solutions space- between technology solution providers and store designers/fixture companies/lighting solution providers/signage companies and so on. For example, retail fitouts company Satin Neo Dimension, recently entered into a strategic alliance with Glue Design, Delhi based retail design firm, through strategic investments. The idea is to bring together the respective strengths towards common business goals. It is likely that market trends will necessitate more such partnerships in the industry, which may well redefine the industry eco-system, as also the quality standards and pricing. That will be an interesting development indeed.



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