

SPRINGFAIR @ H O M E



Post-show report

FEBRUARY 2021



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Content Editor

A note from The Editor

Following the success of Autumn Fair @Home, we were delighted to launch yet another exciting virtual forum for February 2021. Of course, we have missed our in-person events and it has been essential for us to stay connected with our community during this time.

On 8-10 February, we unveiled Spring Fair @Home, with a brand new look and feel to elevate the digital experience. Once again, this was the result of months of hard work and dedication from our entire team as we continue with our commitment to refuel retail this year.

Spring Fair @Home was a huge success and an achievement that we are incredibly proud of. A merging of minds from across the business, Spring Fair @Home provided access to exclusive content, with some of the biggest key names in the industry taking part, as well as a first look at the season's latest collections and a platform for our exhibitor community to reach buyers and shine a spotlight on their products.

This report is designed to bring you all the essential insights from our exclusive webinar sessions, providing you with practical trend and business advice to prepare you to reopen.

Of course, we remain dedicated to reigniting our physical shows as soon as we can, but it is clear that we are now an omni-channel business with the digital capabilities required in the new normal. We look forward to seeing you in September 2021 at Autumn Fair, but in the meantime enjoy the best of Spring Fair @Home...

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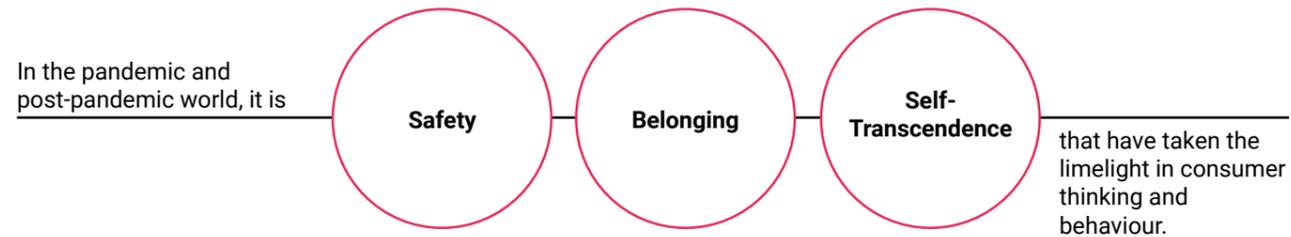
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Understanding consumer psychology

When it comes to retail, understanding the way consumers think could be seen as a shop owner's secret weapon. Getting a grasp on the psychology that underpins the trends and the way consumers think could just be the key to success, especially in a post-pandemic era.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

This is where it all begins. In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow changed the face of psychology when he went about unpacking the minds of everyday people, rather than focusing his studies on mental illness. In doing this, he found that there are a set of basic needs that must be fulfilled before any individual can reach their full potential. These are: physiological needs such as food, sleep and water; safety requirements such as shelter, security and protection; belongingness in the form of love, friendship and acceptance; ego needs such as prestige, status and accomplishment; self-actualisation, which takes the form of fulfilment and enriching experiences; and self-transcendence, which sees the individual focus on others outside of their self.



A sense of safety

When we're talking about safety here, the focus is on psychological safety. And this comes in the sense of control. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a detrimental undersupply in the number of things consumers can control in their daily lives. But one thing they have been able to control is the way they interact with brands and retailers. This has manifested in consumer desire to actively impact businesses and hold them accountable. Pre-pandemic, we were already seeing a shift towards those brands and retailers who were actively making an impact and living up to ethical brand values. The pandemic has massively accelerated this shift, by giving consumers the time to really reassess the brands they want to buy into and re-establish their position firmly in the driving seat when it comes to the business/consumer relationship.

When we talk about psychological safety, it's also important to address a sense of balance. When customers feel off balance, they feel uncertain. And uncertainty leads to feelings of fear and inaction. Bring your customers a sense of balance in a truly tangible way; design clean and clear shop spaces, be consistent with your communications across all platforms and create calming yet impactful video and photo content that doesn't jar with the audience.

Kate's top tip:

Give customers a choice. Whether it's a choice in what colourways to produce next or a choice in which charity your business supports, give them the illusion of control whilst establishing yourself as a brand of action.

A place to belong

We are social creatures, and belonging is important to everyone, at least on a subconscious level. Again, we were already seeing more demand for a sense of belonging within the retail sphere before the pandemic, and the last year has drastically increase this.

Technology and social media are naturally big culprits when it comes to diminishing a sense of belonging and have removed an important layer of physical contact in consumers' relationships. Of course, this isn't news, and the term "loneliness pandemic" will be familiar to many. This is not just in the older generations, in which this has long been a common narrative, but also in younger generations, notably those who are much more active on social media.

Of course, from a retail point of view, it's up to brands to recreate a sense of human contact and intimacy with their customers; it's about being human and authentic, not about being polished and corporate.



Kate's top tip:

Make sure that you are creating opportunities for conversation anywhere your customer interacts with you and responding to them in a human and relatable way. If your tone of voice is more on the corporate side, don't change this straight away but start to gradually phase it out; as much as you want that human connection, you still need to make sure your customer recognises your brand and feels safe.



When it comes to building your community, there are three manifestations you need to take into account: the human community, the local community and your brand community. The human community is about a brand facilitating the closer connection of customers and/or employees. Through curation of events, provision of idea-sharing

platforms and mutual enjoyment of important events, customers and employees get closer to themselves, each other and therefore to the brand or retailer by association. The local community sees the retailer or brand reaching out to support growth within their area, involving local businesses, providing a gathering place and collaborating with local

institutions. And finally, the brand community looks at the retailer enabling and the brand embracing collaboration. Customers have never been thinking about competition when it comes to what they buy and who they buy it from; they want inspiration and a brand mix that is complementary to their lifestyle.

Transcending the self

If the last year has shown us anything, it's that consumers are now thinking beyond their individual needs. From the Black Lives Matter movement, to public health efforts, the focus has been very much on improving and protecting society and communities. Global events have also seen trust shaken in institutions and big businesses, and that trust has been shifted into brands and businesses that are living up to a moral and ethical code that promotes communities, charities and sustainability.

An increased salience around our own mortality has translated into a desire to protect our planet and communities, with brands being called upon to inspire and also provide the resources to enable socially impactful behaviours.

Kate's top tip:

Ask your customers to be straight up with you; what do they want to see you do for your community next? What do they think you could do more of?

How to: Grow your online sales

Ecommerce and digital marketing have provided a lifeline for retail businesses during that last year when physical retailing has not been an option. But venturing into the online world is easier said than done and acquiring all the skills you need to set up a successful digital platform can feel overwhelming. Our training partner, SocialB broke it down into the essentials at Spring Fair @Home to help you wherever you are on your ecommerce journey.

Where to start?

Take it back to basics and put yourself in your customers' shoes. Think about what they might be looking for or doing online; think about what you as a customer do yourself! Of course, you will have your own message to communicate, but you need to go about this carefully to ensure you're hitting customers with the right message, in the right place at the right time.

Don't forget, your customers' shoes likely look very different at the moment as they're spending a lot more of their time at home. That means you'll need to think about adopting different routes to market to ensure you're retaining those customers and fitting into their new everyday lives.



Picking your channels

When it comes to ecommerce, there are no prizes for guessing that your website sits at the heart of everything you do. Everything else you do online should feed into that central hub and that activity, in turn, should always be informed by analytics; digital marketing without analytics is like driving without a map.

You can use any or all of the following when it comes to your channels:



Email marketing



Paid advertising



SEO



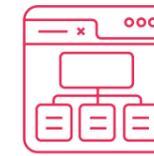
Social media

Whatever you use, make sure you're clear about the purpose of each channel and how it links back to your website. For example, paid advertising might be used more of an awareness tool to keep your brand front of mind, whilst social media could be useful in engaging that audience and encouraging them to click through to your website. Think about how your channels interact with each other to get your customer from A to B or from awareness to conversion.



The SocialB secret website recipe

There are seven key areas you should review on your website.



Navigation

The navigation of your website should enable people to get from A to B quickly and easily. The navigation bar or "main nav" sits along the top of your website and is usually the first place people will look when trying to find something. This should be simple and uncluttered, with just the key segments of your website (such as "Shop", "About", "Blog"). If you have lots of pages, you can incorporate dropdown menus from each main segment on your nav bar which break down the categories or subpages further.



Design

Your web design should reflect who you are as a brand. Make sure you are using the correct logos, fonts and brand colours to ensure continuity across your website and your other channels. Modern design should be clean and uncluttered, with plenty of white space around each image or element on any given page.



Credibility

Many customers will seek out your website to determine if you are a credible business before buying from you. For these customers you need to make sure that your website is a good source of information and is a safe and reliable place to purchase from. Make sure you have the correct SSL certificate (many platforms already have this built in) and consider including customer reviews and ratings to your website.



Call to action

Calls to action or CTAs are another key part of a website when it comes to telling people what you want them to do. There is no hard and fast rule for what CTA text should be, apart from that they use actionable and imperative words. Popular CTAs include things like "Shop Now" or "Sign Up". Experiment with your CTAs and find out what works best for you.



Social media buttons

If you are on social media, make sure you're telling people that you are. Social media can be a good way to be more dynamic and keep customers up to date with the latest info as well as facilitate closer relationships with them. Make sure your social media buttons are easy to find on your website and that your links are kept up to date.



Contact details

It's so important to include at least one form of contact details on your website, whether that's a phone number, email address or contact form. Many people will navigate to a website solely to find out contact details or get in touch with a brand or retailer so make it as easy as possible for them to do so.



Mobile friendly

More internet searches are done on a mobile device rather than on a laptop or desktop so making sure your website is set up for mobile users is crucial. A non-mobile friendly site is incredibly frustrating for consumers and may cost you a sale.

Content is king

It's a phrase we've heard time and time again, but for good reason! Content is the method we use to engage with customers, building that all important "know, like and trust" trifecta. It is also vital to feeding search engine and social media algorithms, thereby boosting visibility.

For credibility's sake, content needs to be updated on a regular basis, whether that's offer promotion, product imagery or blog content. This will signal to your user that you are relevant and still in business.

Make sure you upload all images with relevant "alt text" which will allow Google to identify your imagery and improve your site's visibility. If you choose to have a blog section, ensure you have planned content using a content calendar and make sure you are communicating key dates and events.

As a rule, each page on your website should be content and keyword rich. You should include:



Regularly updated blogs or videos



Genuinely useful text on each page



High quality images on each page



A clear purpose for each page

Driving sales from social media

Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are making it easier than ever for businesses to trade online, with the introduction of in-app, native shopping functionalities. However, whether you use these or not, social media can still be a valuable tool when it comes to growing sales.

Make sure you are responsive to your customers – think of social media like an in-person encounter with your customer. You wouldn't ignore them in store, so don't ignore them online. This goes hand-in-hand with building

a community. Your social media channels should act like a meeting place for your customers. Encourage them to communicate with one another as well as with you. Posting user generated content is one great way to do this. Keep your communications consistent in both tone and in frequency and inject personality into what you're saying, as long as it's authentic! Of course, above all else, make sure you're measuring success. Keep an eye on which posts perform well and start to incorporate this into your strategy, phasing out anything that hasn't worked.

How to measure success

The wonderful thing about digital is that it's so easy to measure and track in real time. And, as we've said already, this can provide valuable insight to inform the direction of your sales and marketing efforts. That being said, it's all well and good pulling the numbers, but don't forget about context! Before you begin, set yourself some SMART objectives and rope off some time to really analyse the numbers against your goals. Depending on what you're trying to achieve, you could look at audience demographic data, follower growth, engagement rate, average time on page and many more!

Use social media's inbuilt analytics to measure platform performance and Google Analytics to understand more about your audience behaviour on site.





Trend update:

Global Consumer Behaviour 2021

2020 has brought about huge disruption to our lives, and the likelihood is that consumer behaviour has changed forever as a result of this. As we push ahead into 2021 at lightning speed, what are consumers looking for, and how can you equip your business to meet their needs? Simon Moriarty, EMEA Head of Trends for Mintel explains.

Digital dilemmas

Whilst there are many benefits to a more digitally connected life, concerns about its negative impacts are putting consumers in a predicament.

In the coming year, we'll see innovation in tech that sees a blur between the human and the digital coming to the fore. Whilst we'll still look to brands for human and emotional connections online, there will be a dissonance with a desire to switch off and stop the burnout caused by hyper connectivity. Brands and businesses will need to offer tech-based solutions to help tackle social issues, such as loneliness, but also help consumers find tech-free moments to switch off.

Technology has a tremendous capability to enhance people's lives. However, the pandemic has created a dichotomy of a need to stay connected vs. a need to take time away from tech. Consumers now demand more from the businesses they invest their time and money into when it comes to technology, including transparency, humanity and the ability to improve their own impact on the world via the brands and retailers they buy into.

With more time spent in the home than ever before, the impact of technology in domestic spaces is also become something consumers are considering more and more. As consumer life continues to slow down, smart home technology is coming to the fore, taking on day to day chores and streamlining life.

What this means for businesses

- Brands and retailers will be expected to provide resources and guidance to help consumers "switch off".
- The power surrounding data will continue to shift in favour of the consumer. Businesses will need to be more transparent about how data is used and use it to create tailored experiences.
- Consumers increasingly want to work with brands online to make an impact on the world around them.





What this means for businesses

- Retailers big and small must understand the power of local and be seen to support local businesses and the local community they operate in.
- Consumers are looking for an “all in this together” mentality that cuts through uncertainty in a playful way.
- There is massive opportunity for retailers to build loyalty through giving customers the resources to make positive change easier.

Sustainable spaces

Covid-19 has subtly but significantly shifted consumer awareness of our relationship with the spaces within which we live, accelerating demand for sustainability.

In 2020, we all benefitted from being part of communities and using local spaces. In light of this, consumers are now looking to protect those local communities and spaces more than ever. And, they will increasingly demand transparency and investment from brands and businesses to help them do this. This refocusing on the local picture will also bring climate change concerns much closer to home, with consumers looking to make changes to protect the natural spaces within their communities, rather than looking further afield to make an impact. Consumers will look to make their communities thrive, which will lead to a reimagining of how spaces are used, as well as a commitment to resource sharing and circularity.

Attitudes around sustainability will also see a shift. With so much negativity and uncertainty in other elements of life, a sense of playfulness will creep into sustainability messaging and efforts. Brands will be expected to make it both fun and easy for consumers to have a positive impact on their world, whilst remaining transparent about their own efforts to operate in a more eco-friendly way.]

Again, home plays an important role in the post-pandemic world, with the domestic sphere no longer being a totally insular space. Consumers will re-evaluate the part their home plays in the wider community, and as such will continue to bring local and ethical products into their homes as they seek to maintain a sense of control and security.

Experiences 2021: Virtual lives

Physical separation due to the pandemic, increased need for escapism and improved technology are driving consumers towards digital experiences.

This year, consumers have turned increasingly to online gaming and virtual experiences as a form of escape from the harsh realities of the world around them. This has led to huge growth of niche digital communities, which present an opportunity for really targeted comms for businesses. Global roll out of 5G technology will continue to connect these communities and will make consumers more accessible than ever, even in more remote parts of the world. However, as in Digital Dilemmas, it is important to understand the balance consumers crave between hyperconnectivity and digital burnout. As technology develops, consumers will demand more control over virtual experiences, and will seek out personalisable and tailored experiences, that allow the consumer to take an active role and also recreate the sense of community that we have been missing.

As consumers continue to understand and use technology in their daily lives, they are becoming more comfortable with and eager to try new things. This all feeds in to a desire to escape and feel the emotive connections that experiences, rather than material goods, can provide. In today’s world, we return to that sense of playfulness; there is a sense of fun and comfort in nostalgic experiences that tell stories.

Virtual experiences need to do more than this though. Multi-functional experiences, that make life both fun and easy allow for retail to tap into the consumer’s multiple needs and become a key presence in that individual’s day-to-day. In this way, VR and AI technologies will reframe what retail is and what it means to the customer. Retail will be required to create engaging and multi-functional spaces that offer much more than a simple transactional experience.

What this means for businesses

- Whether virtual or “in real life”, consumers want to share their lives with others. Virtual experiences must tap into a sense of community and enhance the social life of the consumer.
- Brands and retailers must help consumers to balance their digital and offline lives, helping to manage the different personas the consumer has created.
- Experience isn’t always about offering something new. In many ways, experiences should be used to help consumers slow down and appreciate the here and now or reconnect with nature.



Curating a visual experience:

What's next for instore?

Anywhere you look, there are reports of doom and gloom for the retail industry. And, let's face it, this year hasn't been plain sailing. Unfortunately, we can't avoid the pandemic, but we can use this time to reflect and regroup, breathing new life into our bricks and mortar shops ready to welcome customers back once again. Read on for some top tips and insights from Kirsty Kean, Lead Retail Specialist for Visual Thinking.

An era of opportunity?

Of course, this year has seen a number of challenges for much of the industry, but many retailers have seen the pandemic as an opportunity to emerge stronger than ever. Many have taken the opportunity to take a step back to review their businesses in terms of responsibility and in terms of resilience. These retailers are now re-shaping their business in real-time and with permanent effect, changing with their customers.

From brand collaborations to deliver an even more compelling offer, to tapping into virtual experiences, many of our best-loved names have been embracing the chance to experiment and try something a little bit different. Workshops, tutorials and immersive experiences in real time all encourage human engagement with a brand or retailer so that when shops can reopen, that engaged mindset is already there and the consumer is more than ready to make a purchase.

Getting ready to reopen

The spring should see the majority of non-essential retail stores starting to open up and now is the time to refine, restore, improve or update what has been done before. Whilst your shop is closed, use your time wisely to evaluate, assess and address the good and the bad. Understand what you can do better. Could your operations be streamlined? Are you making the most of window, floor, shelf and wall space? What's really worked in your product range? All of these things could be quick wins that you may not have the time to really consider again.

If one thing's certain it's that there are a few fundamentals of retail that have become non-negotiable for customers.

Core principles of presentation that will help you boost your business:

Be open

Build a sense of community within your shop and become a pillar of your local community to create a loyal army of customers. Tap into the demand for local by highlighting provenance and redefining the ways in which you serve your community. In visual terms, this means showing that you are open. Be welcoming and demonstrate confidence, showcasing your brand and the products you offer.

Be inspiring

It's never been easier for customers to simply order online from the comfort of their own homes. You need to fight convenience with inspiration and experience. Give customers a reason to visit your shop. Think about how you can creatively display products whilst considering how your using your space efficiently. Make sure you balance your big, eye catching displays with plenty of space to allow for social distancing.

Tell a story

In a visual sense, you can tell stories through effective grouping and product placements. Understanding which products complement each other in terms of how the customer may use them can nudge them to see those products as part of their life and in their own home. Of course, effective grouping is also a great way to aid navigation, another important factor to consider in terms of social distancing.

Be the expert

Customers are looking for that comfort in the expertise of others in this uncertain time, so showcase your expertise! Use focal points and displays to elevate product ranges to make it easy for your customers to understand your promotions and stories, and of course, make sure you or a team member are on hand to answer any questions they have as well!

Be credible

When it comes to credibility in your product presentation, make sure you are embodying the following things: a logical order that makes sense to the customer; ease of selection and space to browse without being overwhelmed; and a clear indication of price, however it is presented.

Make it easy

Group products together by category or type, making it really clear what it is this stock does and why it sits together. Keep plenty of space around and between each grouping so it's really clear where one range ends and the next begins. This will help your customer find exactly what they need and as an added bonus, presents you as confident and expert.

Don't forget the details

The basics have never been more important. Don't lose colour and vitality to PPE, Covid signage and hand sanitiser. Balance the sterility of these essential safety elements with expressive colours and comfortable details to build and maintain trust and confidence.

Be brilliant

By combining all of the above, this one will come naturally. Create your army of advocates, become part of a community and be flexible to the changing wants and needs of your customer. With expectations raised, it's about inspiring your customers, so the little details matter more than ever.

Retail interrupted:

A moment for innovation and recovery

The pandemic has well and truly turned retail on its head this year. The interruption in business as usual for bricks and mortar shops has been make or break for retailers up and down the country. Some have used this time to innovate and improve their businesses, including the Spring Fair @Home panellists. Chaired by Rupa Ganguli, founder of Inclusive Trade, our panel of inspiring retailers shared the stories of how they've thrived during lockdown to provide us with some key insights into retail in 2020.



The power of Instagram: asouthlondonmakersmarket



For Liv and Daisy, founders of [asouthlondonmakersmarket](#), it was a case of "pivot or die" when the lockdown hit. Of course, this meant taking operations online, specifically to Instagram. For a traditional, "in real life" market, the ability to pivot was about understanding their own skills and limitations and finding a solution they could implement quickly and easily, as well as something that would continue to answer their exhibitors' needs.

The pivot was all about allowing exhibitors to continue to showcase their products and to continue to connect their community to their makers. From live demos to product spreads on Instagram, [asouthlondonmakersmarket](#) were able to replicate a real-life market experience as closely as possible.



Despite the challenges though, Daisy and Liv have seen this as a period of opportunity to pause and reassess their model. For them, the focus is on understanding what suits their makers best and how they can make their lives easier moving forward. But above all else, when they can get back to hosting their market in person once again, that will take priority. Whilst social media has been an important tool for helping the market create buzz around products and the people who make them, it is the local community and in-person experience that make their business what it is, and that's something that simply can't be replaced online.

The face of the brand: MW Makes



As a designer and maker, **Michelle Wong** exhibits at asouthlondonmakersmarket and loves the traditional market model. For her, going online and becoming the face of the brands has been essential to staying connected, despite being a step outside her comfort zone.

When the initial lockdown hit, Michelle soon realised that her goods, handmade leather items, simply were not an essential item. Like Daisy and Liv, her initial reaction was to step back and reconsider her customers' needs in the given moment. Seeing craft kits become increasingly popular, Michelle

pivoted her product range from leather accessories to leather stationery items, tapping into the changing consumer demands.

Another key change for Michelle was her marketing strategy. For her, marketing in a normal way simply didn't feel right when so many people were struggling with employment and finances. Instead, Michelle pushed herself outside of her comfort zone, getting in front of the camera to offer advice and value to her community with the mindset that if she didn't speak about her and her business, no one was going to do it for her.

Launching during lockdown: Boxd



Unlike our other panellists, who were forced to make changes to their businesses, **Mads Panchoo actually created a brand-new business, Boxd.** Mads recognised a need to do something new during the lockdown in order to continue to reach out to her community. Previously, she had been running an online magazine, The London Mother, about things to do with children in London; something that became obsolete with nothing going on during the lockdown period. However, it became apparent that her community were still looking for things to do at home, especially with teenagers. Boxd

became her answer to her community's needs for the given moment.

Like so many retailers and brands, the main challenge for Mads has been the inability to interact with products in real life when selecting what it is that goes in her box. Her answer was simply to talk to her community, asking them exactly what it was that they wanted to see from Boxd. Interestingly, the audience for Boxd has transformed from the initial London Mother audience. Many companies have contacted Mads asking for boxes to support their employees with working from home or to make meetings more interesting.

A pillar of community: Small Stuff



Hellen, founder of Yorkshire-based Small Stuff, experienced a similar learning curve during lockdown. Whilst she was unable to keep her physical shop open and host the experiential elements of her business in person, the secret was in creating interactive and human elements to keep engaging her audience online and remotely. From sharing her own lockdown life on social media, to hosting zoom workshops and sessions, she found that using online allowed her to recreate more of that personal approach that is an integral part of her business.

Like our other panellists, though, Hellen believes in the power of connection; her customers are craving human connection. When the time is right the plan for Small Stuff will be to perfectly align the on and offline experience, making sure there's a perfect stream between the two so that customers have the choice to interact with the brand how they want. When things return to normal, customers will remember those retailers, like Small Stuff, who have gone above and beyond in creating and retaining that sense of community that we've all been missing.



Retail in 2021:

A view from the top with Theo Paphitis



Serial entrepreneur Theo Paphitis is one of retail's biggest success stories and an avid advocate of the industry's many small retailers and brands. As we head into what is looking like another difficult year for the industry, Theo shared his outlook with journalist Sasha Qadri.

Reflecting on 2020

Like many of the Spring Fair @Home viewers, Theo has encountered both personal and professional challenges during the lockdown; "it's been unprecedented times and I really wouldn't want to live through this again".

Speaking of his own businesses, Theo told Sasha, "we have made a lot of changes and the results have been mixed. In those dark days, we had to shut about 320 stores in the space of 24 hours and it was like cutting off our oxygen."

However, challenging it's been though, Theo's outlook is positive, with predictions for a brighter future ahead. If nothing else, customer demand will buoy the sector up during the recovery period, especially in the local sphere; Theo explains, "there will be a demand for the recreational retail we all enjoy – it's not called 'retail therapy' for no reason".

What does the future hold?

The increase of online shopping is unavoidable when thinking about the future of retail and this isn't going to disappear. The growth of ecommerce is something that has been particularly noteworthy; "we've probably seen a five-year acceleration in the space of six months". Moving forward, Theo predicts it will be very difficult for retailers to survive without a digital platform, although he cites a combination of the two as the recipe for success; "if it wasn't for the combination of the two, I'm not sure businesses would have survived".

If one thing's certain, though, it's that "things will never go back to the way they were". Physical retail will of course return, but Theo's prediction is that this will be in a very different capacity to the high streets and shopping centres we've become accustomed to; "there's going to have to be a rebalancing and a consideration of the way the consumer will now spend their money". With more of a focus on community and experiences, retailers will need to reconsider their role in the lives of their consumers once retail reopens. In fact, the role of the high street as a whole is set to change, according to Theo; "we see a big future in the high street and in our communities. Our cost base is going to need to readjust, but once that happens, I think we'll see a revitalised high street, with more community-based activities and stores that will be of value to the community".

All this being said, though, there is still a fair amount of uncertainty surrounding the future as well. When asked how the businesses are planning for the year ahead, Theo says, "you don't, you can't... until we know what's in the Spring Budget, we can't plan for next year. The key thing is agility and keeping your finger on the pulse".



Place for the quote here Serial entrepreneur Theo Paphitis is one of retail's biggest success stories and an avid advocate of the industry's many small retailers and brands. As we head into what is looking like another difficult year for the industry, Theo shared his outlook with journalist Sasha Qadri.

Is there ever a wrong time to start a business?

Theo has been quoted as saying “there is no wrong time to start a business”; the logical question to this is, what about now? Despite the pandemic though, Theo reminds us to look to the opportunities that have been created by new consumer behaviours as well as some of the casualties the retail sector has sustained.

If nothing else, the pandemic has brought us closer to our customers than ever before; “now you have the ability to reach your customer from your lounge, kitchen or bedroom. There’s so much opportunity to reach out to your customer. It’s never been easier...”.

What’s more, Theo’s noticed a rise in demand for all things new; “all of a sudden, our ability to adopt change has escalated to such levels that we can’t get enough of it... that’s what’s so exciting if you’re looking to start a new business”.

In short, if you can offer something new and roll out an incredible digital marketing strategy the opportunity is yours for the taking.



Talking small business

Of course, the Small Business Sunday (SBS) scheme is something that continues to support both brands and retailers and has been an integral way to retain the community spirit amongst many businesses whilst we remain apart. Spearheaded by Theo, SBS is a way to share the most innovative and exciting small business stories and support a sector that “accounts for 50% of UK GDP”. For Theo the most exciting part of SBS is “the level of enthusiasm and optimism that exist for small businesses. People are really fighting on with their passion and they have amazing agility to adapt”.

So how can small businesses be selected by Theo? “Certainly, they have to have an online presence and a really interesting business idea”. Of course, this is no mean feat, but Theo has some advice to share with small businesses starting out; “make sure you’ve done your homework... half of small businesses fail within their first two years, but most of that can be avoided by doing research, challenging everything you do and making sure you’re truly passionate about it. In times like this, you need that passion to drive you through”.

Working with macro-trends in your business

When it comes to making plans for the future of your business, understanding how to forecast and apply macro-trends could provide you with essential insight. Getting ahead of changes in consumer behaviour can help you justify your business decisions and feel more confident in your future strategies.

Macro trends: the what, the why and the how

Put simply, macro-trends are the overarching influences that form the foundations for the more directional micro-trends.

Change happens every single day; sometimes really obviously and sometimes in more discreet ways. The brands we know and love are the brands who respond and adapt to this change all the way across their businesses; not just in their product line ups.

One of the most common mistakes retailers can make is to rely on data

and insights from the now; this can only get you so far. Of course, it is useful to understand what’s going on now, but you need to understand how to take this data and combine it with cultural cues to understand what is likely to happen in the future.

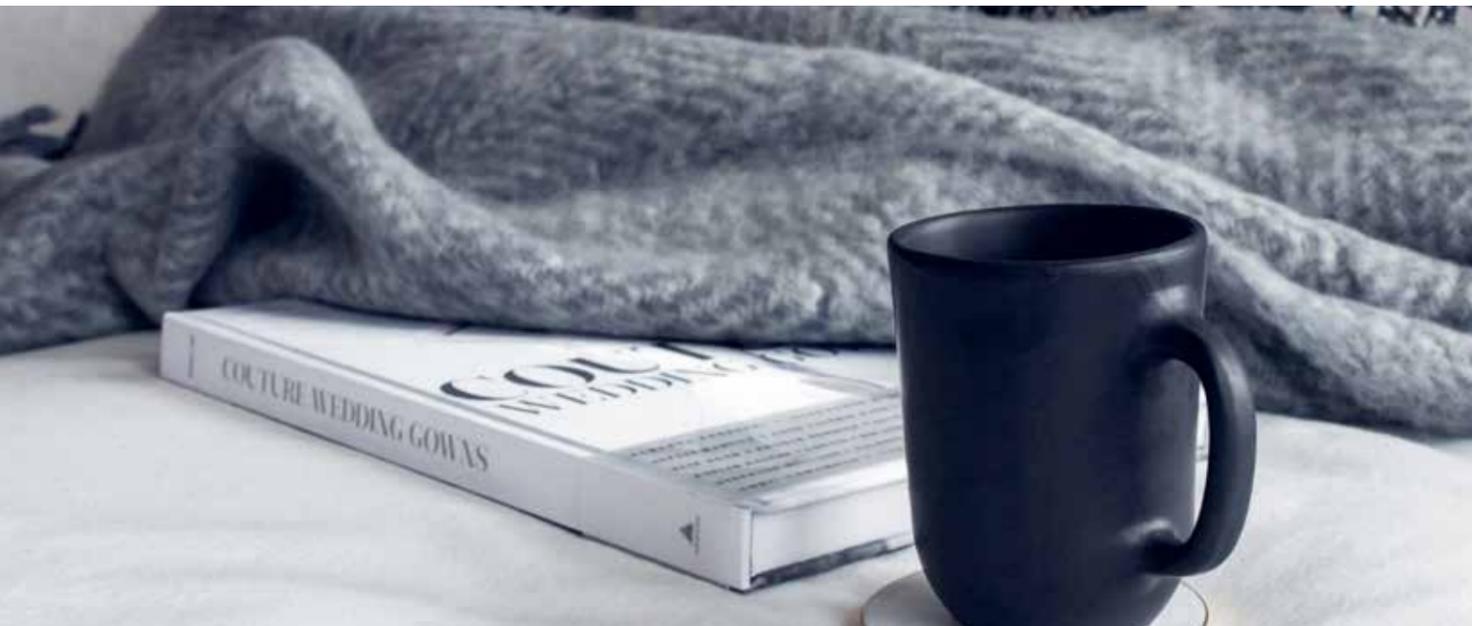
Think of it this way: observing the trends around you right now is trend “spotting”, whilst looking to the future is trend forecasting. Forecasting is about not only jumping on an opportunity, but actually getting ahead of it, capturing the audience as soon as possible.

Understanding how to apply trends to your audience

It's all well and good knowing what's coming next, but are your audience ready for it? If you dive in too early, you'll run the risk of alienating your audience, too late and you'll lose out to your competitors. The trick is to tap into the market at the point when a trend tips from relative obscurity to the mainstream.

Understanding how to apply trends to your business

Trends are great, but you have to be able to pick and choose the ones that are relevant to your own business. A house style is imperative to help you differentiate from your competitors and help your customers understand who you are and what you do.



2021: The Year of Resilience

2020 was a year of rapid change for many people. For this reason, 2021 will be defined by a desire to regroup and recharge. Even as we begin to resocialise following the effects of lockdown, home will continue to be a central focal point.

This will be characterised by two key macro-trends, according to Trend Bible:

The Great Slow Down

Therapeutic Home



The Great Slow Down

A slower pace of life is here to stay. As "normal" activities begin to resume, a rebellious attitude swells amongst consumers reluctant to return to busy pre-pandemic lifestyles. Letting go of long-held "do it all" lifestyles, householders embrace an "anti-performative" mindset. The home becomes a space to facilitate slow introspection; where meaning is found in the inner self, not the validation of others.

A "slacker culture" will ensue, with busy-ness no longer being worn as a badge of honour. Instead, aspirations aim to a more laid-back approach to life, where switching off is celebrated. For homeware and product design, items that encourage indulgent comfort and relaxation are vital; products which promote guilt-free downtime.

We will also see the rise of "insperience" over experience. For many, the prospect of emerging from the homes and back into settings occupied pre-pandemic is a daunting one. The Fear of Going Out (or FOGO) will continue to drive the "insperience" economy that boomed in 2020, as consumers remain cautious. Experiences at home will remain an important opportunity for gifting and homeware.

Intuitive living will also become important. Stress levels have never been higher having dealt with prolonged uncertainties, a deluge of information and experiencing news fatigue. To cope with this, consumers turn to intuition to guide them, learning to trust their gut and act on what feels right for them. To facilitate this mindset, individuals turn to meaningful objects and messaging to focus their mind and body.



Therapeutic Home

Creating a feel-good home is high on the agenda for 2021. A focus on mental health emerges from limited social contact, intensified health concerns and increasing stress levels. Wellbeing and joy become the cornerstones of design for the home; a space to build resilience and enhance emotional state. When selecting materials and colours, precise care and consideration are taken, introducing therapeutic qualities to all rooms.

After the events of 2020, householders are seeking to make themselves more resilient, both mentally and physically. Home design will increasingly focus on recuperation and the continuous regenerative healing of the body and mind.

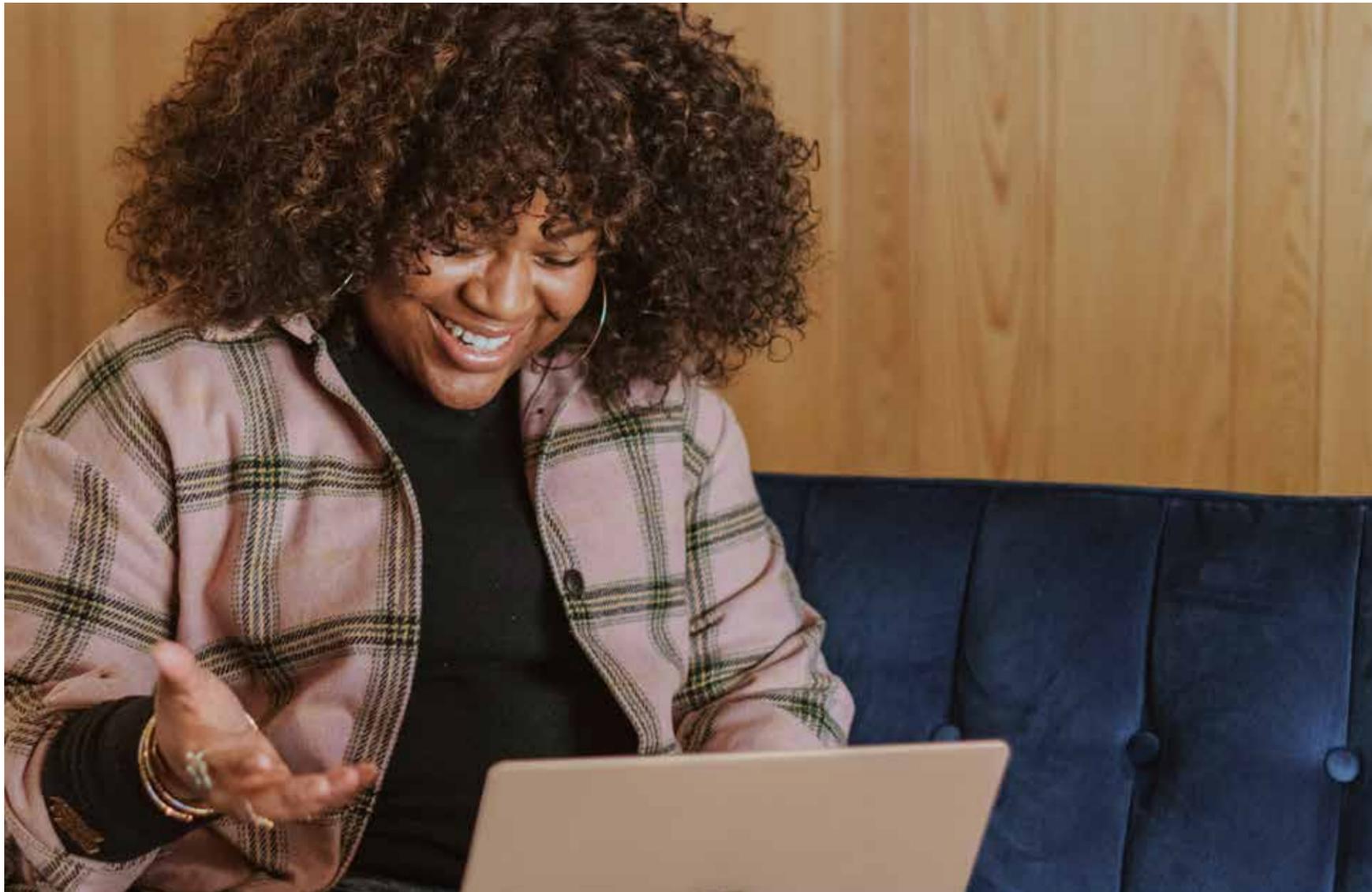
Following a decade of calming minimalism, people are tiring of the sameness that neutral colour trends generate. Increasingly, householders will use colour to shape their environments to deliver specific experiences, whether that's to calm us and make us feel safe or to inspire and delight the senses.

Fear sparked an "eradicate everything" approach to cleaning in 2020; sanitising every surface, removing all traces of microbes, both good and bad. This year, a newer mindset begins to emerge. A focus on gut health and the benefits of good bacteria moves beyond the body. Material choice, home layout and approaches to chores change, as households focus on long term health; cultivating an environment for good bacteria.

Mindfulness practices continue to grow in popularity; newly accompanied in the wellbeing space by ASMR – the process of using touch, audio or visual stimulation to trigger a relaxing response in the body. Tactility in design becomes increasingly important as a way to focus the mind. Product design and materials with tactile features provide soothing sensory stimulation, inducing a feeling of relaxation for householders seeking to switch off and recharge.

Sourcing & buying during a pandemic

In the absence of trade shows, showrooms and store visits this year, retailers have been forced to source in other ways. Sourcing and buying is challenging at the best of times, but when you can't experience product in real life, how do you ensure you are making the best purchasing decisions?



The state of play

As it stands, our high streets are empty. In 2020, approximately 320 stores closed per week and 180,000 people in retail lost their jobs. In January and February of 2021, alone, there have already been numerous acquisitions of household names. We know that the high street is set for change after the pandemic and over the last few months, it has been a case of "survival of the fittest" with digital growth surpassing previous targets. Many have seen new opportunities open up with competitors closing or online channels bringing in new customers. However, now is the time to be future proofing your business, by having the best teams and suppliers and of course, by making really robust buying decisions.

Where can you find suppliers now?

For many retailers, traditional in-person events have always been the backbone to buying and sourcing strategies. But in the interim period where these have not been viable, where else is there to go?

The first place to look is LinkedIn. Many readers will already be familiar with LinkedIn as a personal tool, but it can also be a useful platform to access new suppliers. First thing's first, make sure your business page is up to date, on brand and professional looking; make yourself look like a desirable partner for potential suppliers. You can also use LinkedIn as a useful filtering tool, searching based on product types and location.

Secondly, don't forget about your trade shows. Whilst in-person events aren't viable at the moment, many, like Spring Fair, have taken our operations online, bringing the best of their brands, suppliers and speakers with them. Now is a great opportunity to visit more trade shows than you would normally be able to, and access to global sourcing shows online has opened up as a result of travel restrictions.

Sourcing websites such as Alibaba, Common Objective and Sourcing Playground are designed for the sole purpose of helping retailers access products they may not be able to experience in real life, so these are an absolutely essential place to start.

Returning to social media, Instagram and Pinterest both provide excellent visual mediums to help you access products. Use these channels wisely, understanding your purpose and using hashtags to search through the products and brands you're considering. Make sure you are documenting the searches and results as you go, just like you would at an ordinary trade show.



How to work with suppliers

According to a recent McKinsey survey, these are the top five challenges suppliers are facing right now: region specific shutdowns and supply disruption; disrupted cash flow; shifting market dynamics and value pools; changing ways of working; and shortages created by volatile demand in certain sectors.

With this in mind, try to follow these tips when dealing with suppliers:

Understand their position and workforce capability

Be precise and clear, establish expectations before meetings

Call if needed, don't zoom or email

Build relationships and respect with your suppliers

Factor in more time than usual for meetings and shipments

Have a plan B

Understand how changes to each other's businesses impact the other

Think about how you can both work more efficiently



Managing relationships remotely

Whether this pertains to your own team or to your supplier communications, relationships are so important. Be proactive, addressing any issues and challenges as they arise, as well as identifying and monitoring any risk factors to mitigate any problems. Keep communication channels open, building rapport and mutual respect, ensuring that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, as well as their contractual obligations. Bolster this with regular check ins and reviews to understand what's going well and what needs to be reviewed. Be reasonable and fair with your expectations; these are challenging times for your suppliers as well as for your own business, so you may need to make some compromises.

Understanding where retail's headed

As it stands, 2021 is still looking uncertain. Different countries and industries will take different paths according to the economic and pandemic situations around the world. However, 2021 will be less challenging than 2020, with 2022 looking a lot more certain. When it comes to planning, 2021 is the year to build a solid foundation, looking towards 2022 and beyond.

Keep a finger on the pulse of the global situation right now and check in with your suppliers to understand

how they're planning for 21/22. This will help you to identify the right decisions to make for your business moving forward, allowing you to do this with agility.

At the same time, take a step back for a minute. Your business will have undergone major transformation in the past year; look at what's worked and what hasn't as well as where you need to be allocating time and resources for short-, mid- and long-term scenarios.

Finally, don't feel disheartened if your 2020 and 2021 numbers aren't where you wanted them to be. This period has been unpredictable and unique, and the numbers simply won't reflect your business' "normal". Instead, look at your 2022 plans with 2019's data in the back of your mind as this is more likely to reflect the performance you can expect.

Overcoming Overwhelm

Overwhelm is an all-too-common issue that affects each and every one of us at some point in our lives; no-one is immune! This year in particular has seen many of us feel overwhelmed about things we simply cannot control. Mindset and Business Coach, Roo Davies, talks through some of the ways we can reframe thoughts to avoid letting overwhelm get in the way of our happiness and success.

Reflecting on the causes

The very first thing to remember is that overwhelm is a natural response; it's part of the way we're wired. It's certainly not an indication that you're failing or that you're bad at what you do, no matter how loud your inner voice is shouting those things. Reflecting on the causes of overwhelm is the first step in deconstructing those thoughts and robbing them of their power.

Roo calls our brains the "do not die machine". In other words, our brains are hardwired to keep us safe and away from danger. Unfortunately, we haven't quite taught our brains how to distinguish between "real" and "perceived" danger, so any uncertainty becomes a case of fight or flight. In cases of perceived danger, your brain will trigger the stress hormones designed to keep you safe, but in doing so can actually sabotage your success.

What's your inner voice saying?

On average, we have around 60,000 thoughts a day; 90% of these are repetitive and reflexive. So, if you're not checking in with what's actually going on in your head, it's easy to fall into a pattern of letting unhelpful thinking take over.

First of all, think about how many things your brain is thinking about any given time. Too many thoughts can easily become distracting and overwhelming. On top of this, are you catastrophising? A common cause of overwhelm is the constant stream of what ifs relating to future

situations that haven't happened yet. Lastly, is your inner voice actively undermining your confidence? Chances are, you're not talking to yourself the way you would talk to your friends, colleagues or loved ones.



Overwhelming thinking to look out for...

Since overwhelm is such a common issue, there are naturally a plethora of common thinking patterns that are often the cause.

1. Thinking too far ahead.

Leaving the here and now takes you out of the things you can actually control

2. Piling on pressure.

The expectations we set for ourselves are often unrealistically high and don't allow for flexibility in new situations outside of our control (such as a pandemic).

3. Being overly ambitious.

By all means, dream big. Just make sure those dreams are achievable. Set yourself tasks to complete that work on a day-to-day level to avoid setting yourself up to fail.

4. Comparing your goals and progress.

Make sure you're not letting comparisons with yourself or others undermine your confidence.

5. Being inflexible.

When curveballs come along (and they do) understand that you can change your plans without feeling guilt or resentment.



YOUR OVERWHELM TOOLKIT:

During the session, Roo outlines 4 coping mechanisms to help you manage overwhelm in your personal and professional life.

Remember to SPARK:

Structure:

Make sure you have a structure every day. Make time to plan; this has never been more important. Take your planning down to a weekly, daily or even hourly basis. Map your time and prioritise tasks; we are often “busy fools” when we try to do too much.

Progress:

Don't forget to look back and reflect on what you've already achieved. Bolster your confidence with your successes and learn from what went well so you can build on it.

Accountability:

Take responsibility for your goals. Seek support from friends and family; speak to them about what you plan to achieve and check in with them on your progress.

Realistic:

You need to be realistic to keep yourself motivated. This can be a hard pill to swallow because at the moment you may have to change your goals to make sure they're realistic in the current climate. You just need to accept this.

Kindness:

There has been a huge movement in both personal and professional spheres about being kind to yourself. This is so important because it allows you to avoid self-sabotage and take time out to recharge. Taking a break to recharge doesn't mean you can't cope.

Nurture a helpful mindset:

Your mindset is undeniably one of your most valuable assets; you could “have it all” but if your mindset isn't helpful you won't flourish to your full potential.

It might seem strange to say but thinking centred around “I need to be more positive” can actually contribute to sabotaging your positive outlook. The reason being, this wording is veiled with judgement, expectation and a pressure to behave in a certain way. Instead, reframe “positive” and “negative” into “helpful” or “unhelpful” thinking. This takes the emotion out of it somewhat, helping to bring clarity to how you think and feel.

Helpful thinking is thinking that enables you to make progress, feel in control and feel energised and content. In contrast, unhelpful thinking clouds your view and keeps you stuck where you are.

Unhelpful thinking is often anchored in fear, comparison and worry. Obviously, you can't simply wipe your brain of these thoughts and memories. What you can do is create distance from your thoughts and redefine the way you engage with them. Mindfulness can help you to be aware of these unhelpful thoughts so that when they arise you can switch your focus, remain in the present and reconnect with the goals you want to achieve.

One way to do this is avoid thinking with your feelings. Of course, you can feel certain ways, but don't let that trigger unhelpful thought processes that stop you taking action; “I feel” can very quickly become “I am” if you let it. When this happens, flip the vocab: “I feel worried” could become “I feel curious”; “I feel nervous” could become “I feel excited”.

Disconnect your thoughts from unhelpful emotions which carry negative connotations and relabel them as constructive.

Every time a thought arises, ask yourself: is this helping me move forward, is this helping me reach my goals, is this derailing my efforts? If the answer is “no”, ask yourself “what will serve me well right now?”

Balance your hats:

We all have numerous different roles that we juggle across all areas of our lives. Between work, home, family, pets, friends, community, etc. the hats we wear very soon add up; you may even wear multiple hats in just one of these areas.

It can be helpful to write a list of the hats you wear; seeing it down in

black and white will show you just how much you balance on a regular basis. Look at your list and think about which hats you wear the most and which you enjoy wearing the most. Are there any hats you'd like to wear more or less? Once you've done this, ask yourself, is there a hat with your name on it? Do you spend enough time investing energy into

yourself? Understand where you are investing your time and energy and how you can start to help yourself by readdressing the balance of hats you wear, ensuring you spend more time on those roles that you enjoy.

Focus on what you can control:

Similarly, a quick and easy coping strategy is to simply write out everything that's currently filling your headspace on a piece of paper. Once this is done, simply go through and sort these thoughts into things you can control and things you cannot. The things you can influence

are those to invest your energy in ensuring that you can make progress.

Of course, the things you can't control won't just go away. But, instead of these get in the way of your life, ring fence some “worry

time”. Schedule in an hour, or however long you need, to let those worries take over for the time allocated. This allows you to stay in control of your thought processes and be human, without having a debilitating impact on your productivity and outlook.

The Revival Forecast

Just two months into 2021, we've already seen an astounding pace of change within the retail industry. With Jeff Bezos stepping down from Amazon, to the acquisitions of household names such as Debenhams and Topshop, there's no denying that we are entering a brave new world in retail. As the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel grows ever brighter, it's time to think about how we can revive our industry, breathing new life into retail to reflect the new world we find ourselves and our consumers in.



Where are we now?

With retail still in lockdown for the moment, now is the time to identify and capitalise on the new opportunities that have opened up. For example, it's clear to see that online retail has become more important to consumers over the lockdown, and this digital transformation isn't simply going to go away. Businesses should now be thinking about how they can compete with online retailers with in store experiences and multi-faceted spaces, whilst also ensuring that there is seamless integration between the bricks and mortar and the digital spheres.

But at the same time, it's important to remember that reopening won't bring with it that "hallelujah" moment we've all been waiting for. Whilst the changes that hit us in March 2020 were sudden and unexpected, the recovery simply won't be. In fact, it is likely to be stop-start for a while as adjustments come into effect. Consumer behaviour has been impacted deeply during this period and the transformation will be long-lasting, if not permanent.

Quick wins for retail

One of these changes, and an obvious win, is the new relationship to "local". Consumers have only had access to their local shops and high streets during this time, and the way they see and relate to those places is very different now. When it comes to recovery, there is huge opportunity for shops to leverage the newfound power of local and make sure it remains a firm part of the consumer agenda.

An obvious win for bricks and mortar stores is sensory experience. Consumers will be so excited to touch and feel products again and will likely look to combine the physical and digital experiences, practicing "showrooming" or try (instore) before you buy (online) behaviour. With this increased merging of the two, it's essential to integrate. Create beautiful displays in store and curate memorable experiences to tell your product story and align this perfectly with your social media and website in order to create that seamless experience.

Love it or loathe it, online will remain a key channel for retail as consumers have grown accustomed to the convenience it affords. What's more, there will be many customers who simply are not comfortable with venturing out but are still purchase-ready and actively looking for products just like yours online.

Changing trends

The change in consumer mindset is unavoidable. Consumers have had time to assess their lives, their homes and their lifestyles. They have learned to live with less and have actually thrived on this mentality, changing not only how much they buy, but also, what they buy. For sectors that have been hard hit by the lockdown, now is not the time to rest on your laurels and hope the market goes back to "normal"; because it won't. For those categories that have performed well, the challenge is not to be complacent. We don't know how the next year will pan out, so assuming that your product or category will continue to see success based off data from 2020 is a dangerous game.

The way customers think about and perceive their world has fundamentally changed. For example, the role of home and the domestic sphere is vastly different, and consumers will continue to use their homes as multi-functional work/ play/ learn spaces for a long time. Put simply, home has become the focal point for many more things, and so the way you tell your product stories needs to change too; you're not selling one or two products, you're now selling an entire lifestyle.

The retail experience needs to be so much more than a transactional space now. Consumers are adaptable and they glide between on and offline with ease; you should too. Whilst digital is more experiential than it used to be, the majority of customers still only really use it as a transactional tool. In real life, the experience needs to be bolder, more memorable. Shops have become destinations and retail is about much more than simply buying a product.

Tapping into your community

A loyal customer community is your best brand asset. Tapping into their feedback and their content is one of the best ways you can make them feel like part of your brand and understand what they are looking for from you.

Social media is one of the best places to start when it comes to understanding and communicating with your community. Monitoring and reposting user-generated content (UGC) is one of the best ways to build this community spirit on your channels whilst also understanding exactly how your product fits in with your customers' lifestyles and homes. What's more your loyal customers are better advocates than any macro-influencer can be in that they have real-life authentic experience of your product and will share this with their family and friends who could become new customers.

As well as this, understand the way people use hashtags when they talk about your shop or brand and mark out where your shop space is so people can use maps to find it easily. Right now, you could also consider renting out your space to local creatives or key workers and putting yourself on the social media map is a great way to advertise that your space is up for grabs.

Of course, your community is likely to also generate some negative comments and feedback; unfortunately, that's a fact of business and you can't please every customer. In these cases, just face into the feedback, offering an authentic and personalised apology. Taking the emotion out of it, hard as it is, is also important. Step back from negative feedback and understand how you can use it to further improve your business.

Reasons to be cheerful in 2021

It has been a tough year, but better days are yet to come. From a creative point of view, the lockdown has given many people the time and impetus to start their brands and embrace their creativity in new ways. In turn, this has transformed our cities and towns into the creative hubs they once were; this could signal a new "roaring 20s" era.

