

THE LENS · WALKING INTO JAVITS · PART 2 OF 7

Experiential Retail: Inside the Store and Beyond Its Walls

Stores have more ways than ever to give people a reason to visit, stay and come back. The question is which experiences fit the brand, the format and the location, and who keeps them running.

THE SHORT VERSION

Stores have traditionally been places where a shopper would browse, select, and make their purchase. That hasn't disappeared, but retailers and brands now have more opportunities to engage customers before, during, and after the transaction: trying a product, speaking with a specialist, attending a workshop, enjoying entertainment, or connecting with a community.

The challenge isn't turning every store into an entertainment destination. It's understanding what kind of experience makes sense for the customer, the brand, the shopping occasion, and the location. And whatever a retailer builds, store teams need to be able to run it, fix it, and keep it fresh.

WHY IT MATTERS

Experiential retail isn't new. Remember the shopping experience in Pretty Woman? The outfits being brought out, the personal attention, even the pizza. No interactive displays, sensors, or AI required. What's changing is how much more retailers can do with experiences today, and how digital has changed what customers are accustomed to.

"Connected" works two ways. Digital tools connect the store to the shopper. Events, services, food, and community connect the shopper to something worth coming back for. And if a store drives online sales, community, and relationships well beyond its four walls, should we still judge it, and pay its people, mainly by what rings up at the register?

MORE TOOLS, MORE CHOICES

AR, VR, interactive displays, digital media, mobile devices, AI, and connected store systems open new ways to support discovery, personalization, entertainment, and service, and not just in flagships. A smaller location might use a customer's own device or a single interactive display.

WHAT'S CHANGING

1. **Interactive and personalized.** At PUMA, an interactive wall developed by Outform responds when someone picks up a shoe, showing information about that product. These experiences help people understand products and make better decisions, and let a brand show its why instead of just telling it.
2. **Destinations, hospitality, and formats.** Disney and Universal have understood the power of experiences for years. LEGO brings that thinking into retail and adapts it by format: elaborate builds in a flagship, Pick a Brick and mini-figure customization at the mall, a few minutes of it in an airport. The experience isn't identical, but it's recognizably LEGO.
3. **Community and beyond the walls.** Fleet Feet brings people together through group runs. Nike uses fitness classes and community events. Grocers offer cooking classes and tastings. These experiences don't have to happen inside the store: festivals, pop-ups, sponsorships, and local partners meet people where they already spend time.



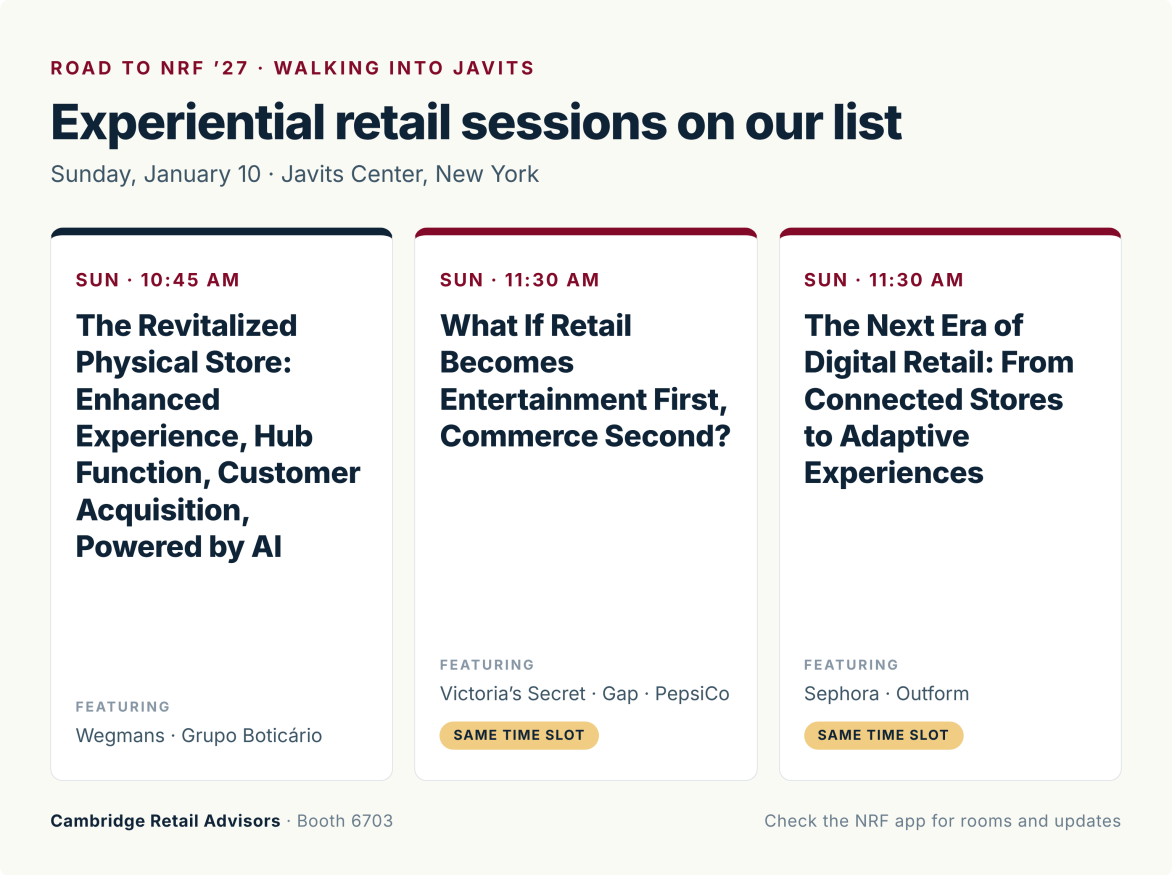
CHOOSING THE RIGHT MIX

The temptation is to add every new capability. Put too much together and a store can start to feel like Times Square or the Las Vegas Strip. The opportunity is the right mix of technology, people, services, entertainment, and community.

THE LENS · EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL · AT THE SHOW

WHAT WE'RE WATCHING AT NRF

Three sessions on Sunday, January 10, each approach experiential retail from a different angle: how brands create experiences, how technology supports them, and what it takes to make them work in everyday operations. Two of them happen at exactly the same time, one of those NRF moments when you wish you could clone yourself.



A FEW COMPANIES WORTH EXPLORING

- **Outform (Booth 6609).** The team behind the PUMA wall on page 2. Physical products, interactive merchandising, and digital experiences.
- **Creative Realities (Booth 2201).** Digital content, signage, and interactive experiences managed across large store networks.
- **VusionGroup (Booth 4839).** From the shelf: pricing, product information, shopper guidance, and retail media.
- **RetailNext (Booth 4647).** Measuring customer traffic, movement, and engagement within stores.
- **ASTOUND Group.** Immersive environments, pop-ups, brand activations, and live experiences. Worth earmarking even if they're not exhibiting.

The question isn't how many new technologies or experiences a retailer can introduce. It's which ones make sense for the customer, fit the brand, and can be supported across the business.

THE LENS · EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL · NEXT STEPS

MEASURE THE STORE DIFFERENTLY

+6.9%
−11.5%

ICSC research found that opening a store lifts online sales in its surrounding trade area by 6.9% on average, while closing one drops them 11.5%. If stores contribute well beyond their four walls, should that change how we evaluate the location, its managers, and the associates who drive that growth?

TAKE THESE FIVE QUESTIONS TO EVERY BOOTH

1. What does this look like six months after install, and who keeps the content fresh: corporate or the store?
2. How does it work in a 3,000-square-foot neighborhood store, not just a flagship?
3. What do my associates have to do to run it, fix it, and keep it going?
4. What do you measure besides sales: engagement, repeat visits, online lift in the area?
5. What customer data does it use, and how does the shopper know and control that?

THE TEST

Are you choosing experiences because they fit your customers and your stores, or because they looked great on the show floor?

COMING UP IN THE SERIES

Part 3 asks whether new tools are empowering associates or adding work. Parts 4 through 7 cover AI and checkout, in-store retail media, inventory and returns, and the systems that have to work together.

Previously: Part 1, Before Javits: What Journey Are You Trying to Improve?

SCAN

Read the article

Open the guide

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We aren't software vendors, and we aren't theoretical consultants. CRA is a specialized retail advisory firm of seasoned industry operators who have lived with the systems, led the implementations, and solved the operational friction. Strategy, system selection, and execution grounded in real retail experience. Read the full article at cambridgeretailadvisors.com.
See us at NRF '27, Booth 6703.