

Retailers need to innovate in-store, not only online



By [Louise Marsland](#)

12 May 2014

There is one massive sector of the market that seems to withstand any and all attempts to provide a better experience for the consumer, despite all the technology on offer and other innovations in marketing and branding - and that's in-store retail.

No wonder online shopping is increasing globally - in-store shopping is mostly still a dirty, noisy, crowded, tedious, rude experience.

Despite having written about the FMCG market and retailing/marketing for the past 18 years and being an extremely dedicated in-store shopper (I have a toddler, OK, shopping IS my social life!), there has been little meaningful change in the grocery shopping environment, or even in the mass market fashion retail environment in two decades.

And I don't buy the warehouse "look and feel" keeps prices down argument. Retailing is supposed to be a pleasant experience mostly - you get to consume or wear what you buy - so why does it feel like a grudge purchase so often?

Yes, customer service has improved, product lines have improved, supermarkets have fancy deli sections, but it is still hard to find things, navigate tightly packed aisles, and as a shorty, I still can't reach anything on the top shelf!

Nice ad - but where's the pleasant shopping experience?

Technology has advanced to such an extent that consumers are using applications way ahead of retailers in-store, like [Pricecheck](#); tweeting about their experiences; crowdsourcing opinion; accessing social media in the queues (and WHY do we still queue when shopping trolleys could scan our products already? Or we could, with our cell phones!)

We have all these loyalty cards weighing down our wallets and shopper points and price specials and special pricing, etc. But what we don't have is a pleasant shopping experience. One that reflects the millions that the brands spend promoting their products or fashion in the retailers which are not consistent in how they display those brands or service their customers.

We have amazing pop-up stores, fabulous experiential theatre productions from brands, adverts shot by Hollywood directors, wonderful technology screens to highlight specials, architecturally-designed shopping centres... but our mass market retailers are falling woefully behind in making shopping a pleasant experience.

Consumer backlash

South Africa is obviously not alone. I've done retail tours of the biggest retail brands in the US and the UK over the last two decades and retailers the world over are experiencing a consumer backlash, particularly in the developed world, where online shopping is increasing.

That is why retail innovation is a priority for UK retailer [Waitrose](#) which has just announced a host of upmarket innovations to reward loyal customers in-store and provide a more pleasant shopping experience - while still competing with discount retailers on price.

Waitrose will be introducing juice bars, free coffee/tea, free newspapers, wine tastings, a café, a deli and cake bar, and other [in-store innovations](#) to provide customers with a quality shopping experience. As Waitrose boss Mark Price said last week in *The Guardian*, "You have to work out what customers want. Value isn't just about price; it's about quality, the store environment and services, all of those things."

It is all about giving customers an "experience". A good experience would be great in our local supermarkets. Dare we hope the Waitrose innovations will become a trend?

I think our retailers just need to get out more - have a look at other retail environments and the creativity attached to some of them. Don't you just love this idea of a secret design hub and idea accelerator disguised as a pop-up [taco shop](#) in New York?

I've experienced some great examples locally too. Mass market doesn't have to equal mass-indifference, surely? And discount shouldn't equal downmarket.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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