

imaginestudio™

Where convenience meets care

*Designing belonging,
well-being, & effortless loyalty*


Trends & Inspiration Q1 2026

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Introduction

The following sections on trends, insights, and strategy have been curated to represent Imagine Studio's collective thought leadership regarding future customer and client needs.



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Need to Know & Opportunities

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- Support the patient shopper
- Maintain a focus on value
- Provide a premium offering at value prices
- Invest in wise tech
- Refresh stores with smart layouts and navigation
- Revitalize serendipitous discovery

Starbucks and Bank of America rolled out a joint rewards program earlier this year, rewarding BofA cardholders who link their account with Starbucks Rewards with 2% cash back on any purchases made at the coffee chain. For every \$2 spent at Starbucks, rewards members will get an extra “star”. The venture enables the major brands to work collaboratively to retain their vast consumer bases.

From Transaction to Relationship

The Path to Building Trust & Loyalty

From Transaction to Relationship

Need to Know

Ritual habit loops are structured sequences where a cue triggers a routine, which is then rewarded—mirroring the classic habit loop but with a focus on emotional and sensory enrichment. In the context of 2026-2028, these loops are being designed to help consumers manage stress, find moments of calm, and experience micro-joys (“glimmers”) throughout their day. Brands are leveraging this by embedding rituals into product use, retail experiences, and digital touchpoints, making wellness accessible and emotionally rewarding.

Consumers are seeking brands that play a meaningful role in their daily rituals and reward loyalty through more than just points or discounts. Emotional connection, ethical alignment, and participatory experiences are now central to building lasting loyalty and brand advocacy.

Loyalty loops are shifting from transactional rewards to emotionally driven, culturally rich experiences. Streamlined, omnichannel systems with simple, tangible rewards (instant discounts, freebies) remain essential for value-conscious consumers, but emotional bonds, exclusivity, and gamification are now key differentiators—especially for Gen Z and Millennials.

Proof Points:



As the loyalty space gets more crowded, retailers will need to get creative to keep consumers engaged. In 2024, 90% of US consumers belonged to at least one customer loyalty program, and held an average of 19 memberships each, with only 9.3 of those memberships being active. Brands that reward engagement and action – as well as spending – will thrive.

Successful retailers in the membership and loyalty arena will be those that move beyond traditional pay-for-play schemes, and instead recognize a foundational principle: you must first build a relationship. Any time you’re able, as a retailer, to create a relationship with a customer in an environment you can control (such as a loyalty program), it not only fosters advocacy and retention but also enables one-to-one communication and better personalization. Research shows customers who have an emotional relationship with a brand spend 306% more over their lifetime than those who don’t. These relationships aren’t only good for business, they enable a brand to tailor products, services and tools based on real-time feedback directly from its most loyal customer base.



WGSN Insight’s membership framework is a guide to understanding how brands can capture loyalty utilizing three pillars: **Community, Consistent Value and Hyper-personalization** to align with shoppers’ shifting values and expectations.

From Transaction to Relationship

Opportunities

In a highly competitive market, fostering loyalty through incentives that transcend transactions will help win over a new generation of emotionally driven consumers. At the same time, mass brands must cater to budget-conscious shoppers by offering straightforward, tangible rewards that provide instant satisfaction.

The rising cost of acquiring new customers will fuel more brands to focus their growth strategy on retaining loyal customers amid the cost of living crisis. According to November 2023 research by SimplicityDX, customer acquisition costs soared by 222% over the prior eight years, resulting in brands losing an estimated \$29 for every order. Due to this, brands must expand their approach to loyalty to include new and innovative tactics that drive engagement, such as gamification and ring-fenced access to products and services.

- Deloitte's 2024 Retail Outlook highlights strengthening loyalty programs as the top growth opportunities for retailers, with data indicating that 77% of US consumers will spend more money with brands to whose loyalty program they belong.
- Value propositions need to be more than transactional to engage customers, as more than 80% of executives recognize that their programs are similar to other schemes.
- Loyalty programs that offer simple points and rewards systems are the number one way to keep global customers coming back.
- Exclusive paid membership programs are becoming increasingly sought after. Since 2021, participation in paid loyalty programs has tripled, rising from 17% to 53% in 2023.
- Hyper-individualized offers will be vital to converting Gen Z. According to a US study, 85% of Gen Z indicate they are interested in receiving personalized offers from merchants.

Key Strategies

Streamline your system: Offer tangible rewards and a simplified omnichannel strategy to appeal to value-conscious consumers who prioritize convenience and cash incentives.

Drive loyalty through diversification: Build an emotional bond between your brand and your customer by creating cultural experiences – a key differentiator, particularly for luxury brands.

Belonging with benefits & building members-only loyalty: Loyal customers want to be recognized and rewarded with exclusive access to new products, limited-edition drops, services and events.

Gamify loyalty: The phasing out of third-party cookies means brands must find new ways of tracking consumers' online behavior, adopting new technologies and strategies that enable them to gather data effectively.

Harness the power of co-opetition: Cross-category collaborations allow brands to pool resources and share costs while maximizing their reach and boosting reward potential.



In a crowded loyalty program space, brands must innovate and stay ahead through gamification, community-building strategies and peer-to-peer commerce.

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From Transaction to Relationship

Key Strategies

Streamline your system

Forget complex tiers and point-chasing, today's cost-conscious consumers crave simplicity, convenience and value.

- Streamline your loyalty program to win over consumers as they become more financially savvy and spend with caution. Essential to this will be clear, straightforward rewards that can be tracked easily with immediate benefits.
- Research shows that multi-buy promotional offers (such as buy-more-to-save-more) are less attractive to shoppers, who prefer simple, tangible offers, such as free shipping as an incentive.
- Unify your programs into one stream with one reward currency, which can operate across all sales channels. A global study by PYMNTS found that 72% of consumers want an omnichannel rewards program.
- Tangible rewards are important: instant discounts, freebies and cash incentives are a critical hook for cost-cutting consumers.
- Make flexibility a core value proposition, but don't overcomplicate it. Look to Starbucks' NFT-based reward scheme, Starbucks Odyssey, which was dissolved in March 2024 after a two-year beta trial, with users citing complex processes (multiple reward currencies, time-consuming onboarding) and an unclear value proposition.



US department store **JCPenney** has relaunched its JCPenney Rewards and Credit Program, simplifying the scheme to focus on basic one-to-one cash incentives. Customers earn one CashPass point per \$1 spent and receive a \$10 CashPass Reward when they hit \$200 as well as earn extra bonus points upon signing up, and on their birthdays.



Kohl's (US) has increased its reward offer by 50% to boost softening sales growth. Kohl's Rewards members using the Kohl's store card now can earn rewards at a 7.5% rate, compared to its previous 5%.



REI Co-Op's membership costs just \$30 and lasts a lifetime. The brand uses clear and simple messaging to highlight the program's benefits.



US-based lingerie brand **Adore Me** has developed a VIP membership, where every sixth underwear set is free.



Target (US) relaunched its loyalty program, Target Circle, in April, which sees offers and discounts automatically applied at checkout, making the process easier.

From Transaction to Relationship

Key Strategies

Drive loyalty through diversification

Amid a burgeoning experience economy, retailers should focus on building customer loyalty through strategic diversification that goes beyond products. This holistic approach transcends the transactional relationship, building a loyal community around the wider brand experience.

- Make culture an essential part of your value proposition. Luxury brands are tapping into the contemporary art scene, #BookTok culture, and the world of academia to engage consumers with offline activations that meet the desire for deceleration and emotional bonding.
- Transcend the transactional relationship. Bake in free giveaways or one-off, immersive activations that offer a simple moment of cultural exchange with no obligation to sign up or purchase.
- Establish in-store culinary destinations by tapping into Gen Z's desire for food hype. Adapt to cultural specificities according to culinary tastes, and work with local partners to fine-tune your hospitality offer. This experiential pivot allows brands to solidify their position as lifestyle destinations, capitalizing on the rise of experiential spending and offering customers a clear point of difference. Diversifying into beyond-retail opportunities could represent up to 40% of retailer profits by 2027, according to McKinsey.
- Gen Z's appetite for the IRL community is strong. Develop invite-only events that unlock exclusive access to your brand's cultural universe, such as pop-up museums, archival trunk shows or design studio tours.



Aesop (Australia): To mark International Women's Day, the skincare brand gave away free books by female authors at select stores across the globe, with no obligation to purchase. Each book was stamped with a limited-edition, store-specific seal.

From Transaction to Relationship

Key Strategies

Drive loyalty through diversification



Louis Vuitton (France): The luxury retailer curated an invite-only experience across seven floors of a Park Avenue townhouse, showcasing rare pieces, bespoke creations and heritage craftsmanship. Interactive workshops and personalized experiences were designed to solidify client relationships and build emotional bonds.



Zegna (Italy): The fashion brand's inaugural Casa Zegna pop-up in Shanghai in May 2024 saw top-tier clients attend a week-long cultural immersion into the Zegna universe. The experience unfolded over a series of immersive spaces, including a retail area and cafe, culminating in a private lounge where VICs could purchase products made exclusively for the store.

To Summer (China): The C-beauty brand opened a Virginia Woolf-inspired concept store in Shanghai, collaborating with neighboring businesses. The store included a coffee shop by local cafe Naive and a selection of books from feminist bookshop Paper Moon. To celebrate the opening, customers who spent over 1,500 RMB received a co-branded coffee or cocktail.



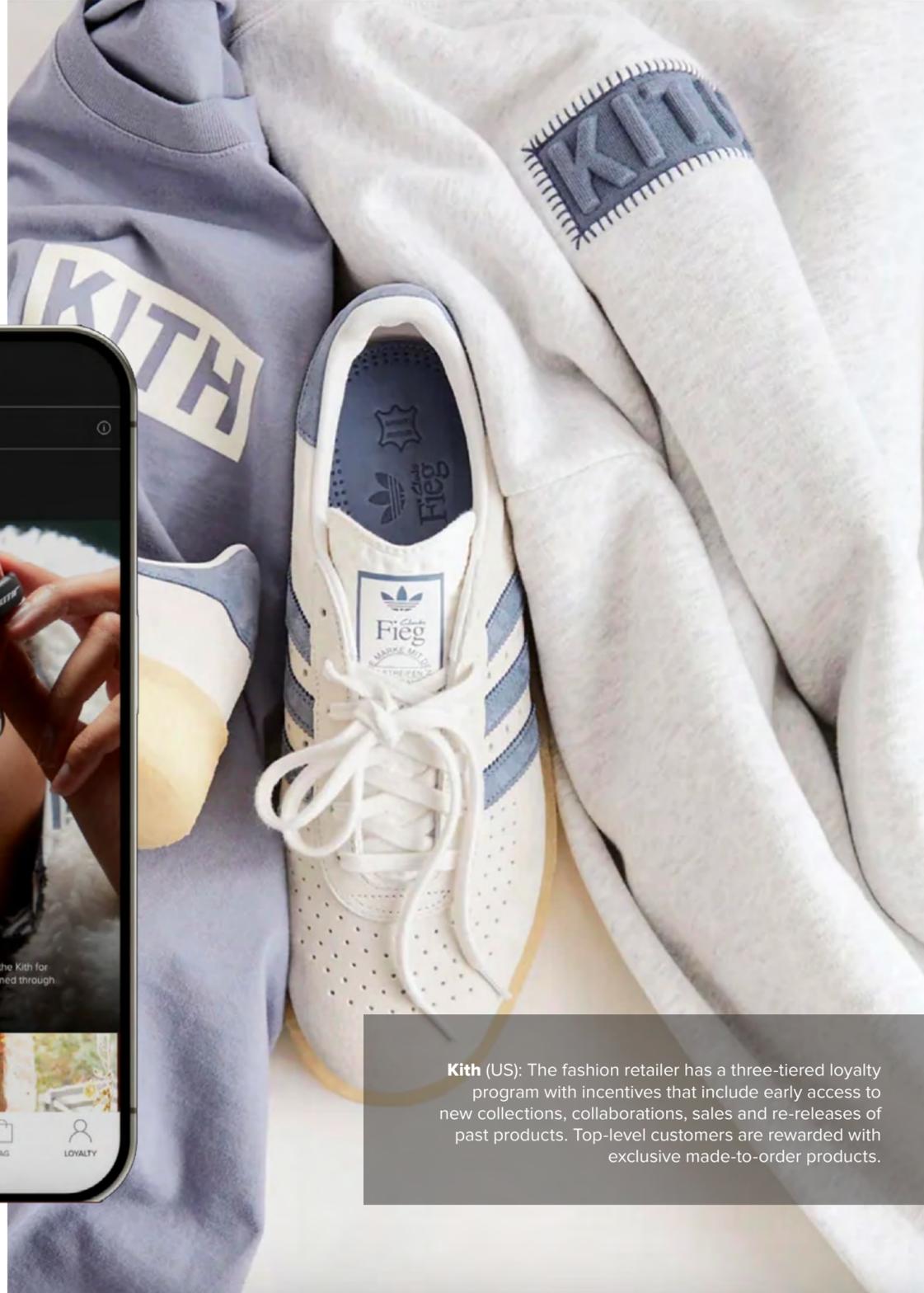
From Transaction to Relationship

Key Strategies

Belonging with benefits & building members-only loyalty

Customers are looking to have their loyalty rewarded at retail, through gaining access to products and services exclusively reserved for members. These incentives can offer high emotional value, tapping into consumers' desire to feel recognized as a core member of a brand's premium community.

- With 33% of UK consumers expressing a desire to be part of a brand's community, retailers should consider focusing less on giving customers hard financial rewards (freebies, discounts, points) and instead offer retail experiences that cultivate an allyship between brand and customer.
- Amp up loyalty member perks by extending first access to new products, limited-edition drops and new collaborations.
- Court brand connoisseurs by allowing members access to re-releases, past collections and archival pieces.
- Offer exclusive services, such as on-demand delivery, priority checkout, in-store returns, tailoring, customization and repairs.
- Leverage your inner-circle loyalty members as opportunities to test the market and gather information on customer behavior and preferences.



Kith (US): The fashion retailer has a three-tiered loyalty program with incentives that include early access to new collections, collaborations, sales and re-releases of past products. Top-level customers are rewarded with exclusive made-to-order products.



Ffern (UK): The natural fragrance brand produces seasonal fragrances four times a year, which are exclusively released to "ledger members". Joining the ledger is free, and members receive special prices, samples and access to exclusive benefits, including workshops and events at the brand's London flagship.

Bottega Veneta (Italy): The luxury retailer unveiled a new Venice palazzo as part of the luxury brand's strategy to elevate its VIC experience. The residence is by appointment only for the brand's top-spending customers. Inside guests are granted access to made-to-order garments, personal shopping consultations and a first look at new products.

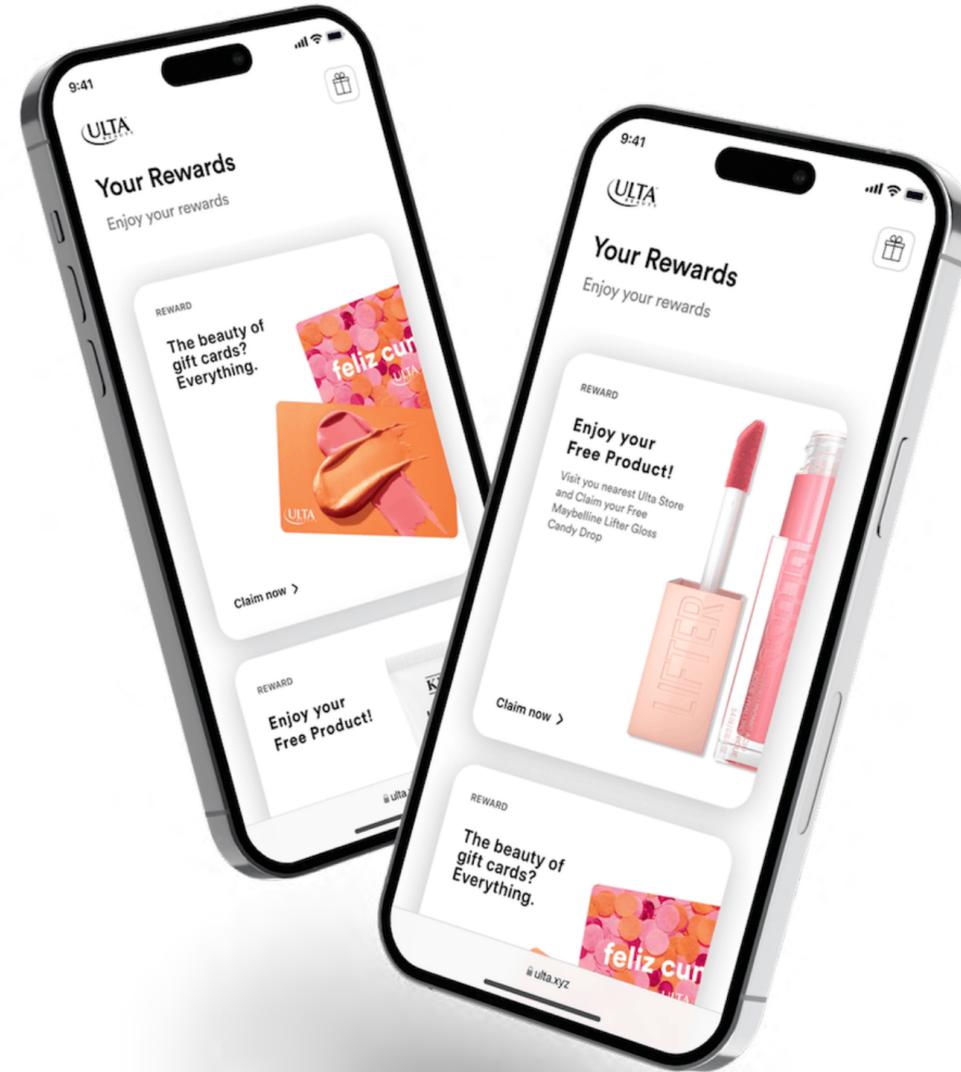


From Transaction to Relationship

Key Strategies Gamify loyalty

The phasing out of third-party cookies means brands must find new ways of tracking consumers' online behavior, adopting new technologies and strategies that enable them to gather data effectively.

- Online games are key opportunities to increase e-commerce dwell time and create the type of engagement valued by Gen Z (65% spend over three hours daily playing video games), which synchronistically enables brands to gather key data on consumers' shopping preferences.
- Adapt to a cookieless future by rewarding customers for participating in quiz-based challenges which present a more entertaining way of revealing their preferences. For example, Kith rewards customers with points if they fill out their shopping preferences via the brand app, or open the app seven days in a row.
- Focus on the story, not sales. Investigate new platforms and technologies such as spatial computing to allow you to tell an immersive and vivid story without the pressure to make a purchase.
- Motivate your community with a mix of internal rewards (fun, mastery) and external motivators (badges, recognition). Both fuel participation, but use them strategically: internal drives last longer, while external ones can spark engagement but might fade. Find the right balance to create a thriving community.



Ulta Beauty (US): The beauty retailer is piloting GlamXplorer, a gamified loyalty program targeting top Ulta Beauty Rewards members. The program uses mini-games, virtual try-ons, and personalized rewards to drive engagement, achieving an 86% weekly return rate and 68,000 quests completed among its initial 1,000 participants.



Balenciaga (France): The luxury house launched BFRND: The Game, featuring the brand's long-time music collaborator, electronic musician BFRND. The game is available for anyone to play via a WeChat mini-site, while exclusive levels can be unlocked with a special NFT chip embedded in Balenciaga x BFRND tees and zip-hoodies.



Gucci (Italy) takes a unique approach with its free app for Apple Vision Pro. Its immersive app transports users into the life story of Creative Director Sabato De Sarno. Users can even interact with products, but crucially, the app doesn't push for a sale. Instead, it leverages the Vision Pro's immersive capabilities to deliver a captivating and non-transactional brand experience.



Encourage socialization by creating a space for users to interact, share and compete, fostering a sense of community, collaboration and accountability.

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From Transaction to Relationship

Key Strategies

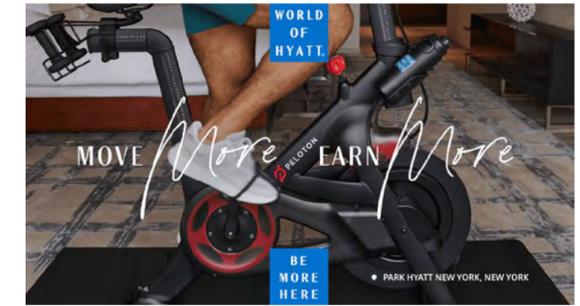
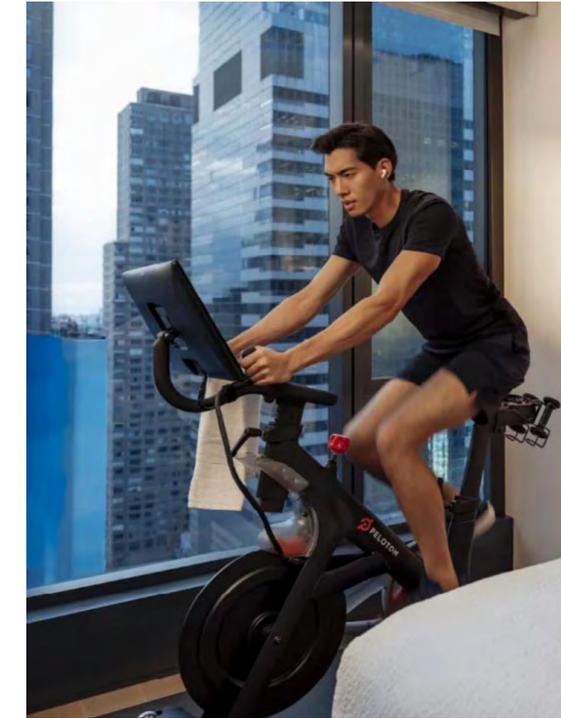
Harness the power of co-opetition

Brands with aligned visions should work together and revisit the co-opetition playbook to boost customer acquisition by leaning into their respective communities. This approach allows brands to deliver high emotional value for relatively low costs while optimizing customer acquisition opportunities.

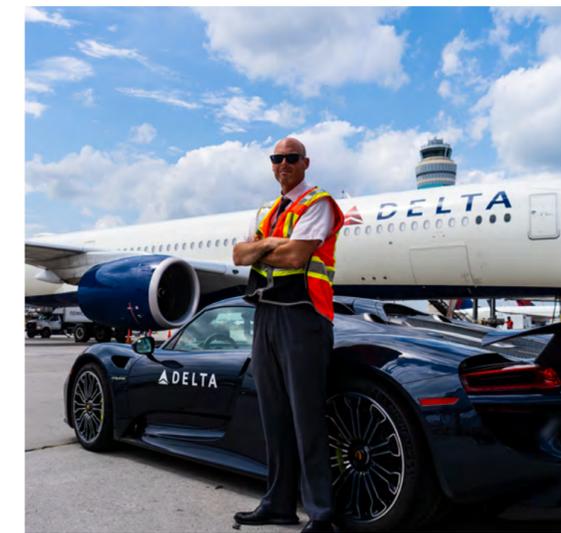
- Co-branded loyalty programs offer an attractive value proposition for customers, increasing their access to a wider variety of rewards while enhancing their overall experience. In fact, research shows that 77% of US consumers in loyalty programs will buy more products from the companies to whose loyalty programs they belong.
- Choose your brand partner according to your purpose and mission, using the collaboration as opportunities to express your brand values.
- Develop a reward system that brings mutually appealing benefits for existing customers within your brand universe.
- Share resources to optimize benefits for customers. Co-created and collective efforts will be vital to unlocking new solutions and redefining traditional approaches, systems and economies.



Sustainable beauty retailer **Big in Hackney** (UK) and natural skincare brand **Dulcie** joined forces to reward participants of a local litter pick with free Haeckels samples, which had to be collected from the store.



Using health and fitness as a lever to loyalty, **Hyatt Hotels** (US) offers World of Hyatt members points for using **Peloton** bikes at select Hyatt locations. Members who are new to Peloton will also receive a free six-day trial of the Peloton app and discounts on Peloton equipment.

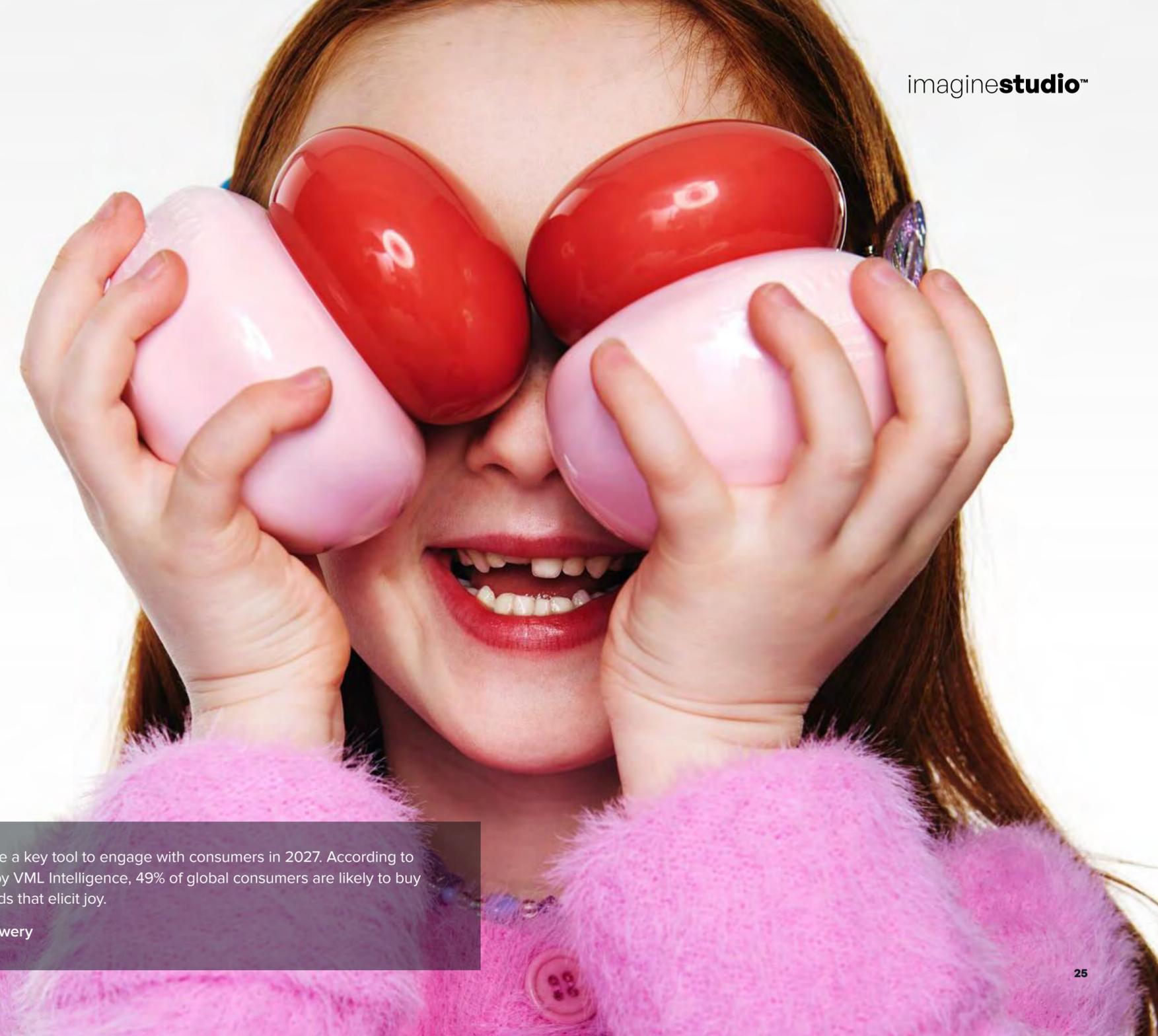


US airline **Delta** offers members of its elite loyalty program the chance to be collected plane-side by a **Porsche**. The hook is that the experience cannot be pre-booked; it works on the principle of surprise, rewarding frequent flyers with the unexpected perk when they disembark the plane.

Connected Well-being

Designing for Care, Joy, & Connection

Connected well-being is rapidly evolving as a macro force, reshaping consumer expectations and business opportunities across sectors. The focus is shifting from individual wellness to holistic, community-driven, and emotionally intelligent models that prioritize connection—between people, technology, nature, and brands.



Play will be a key tool to engage with consumers in 2027. According to a survey by VML Intelligence, 49% of global consumers are likely to buy from brands that elicit joy.

@helloglowery

Connected Well-being

Need to Know

Consumers are doubling down on their wellness spending, even amid recession fears, creating new opportunities for retailers to show up in non-traditional health spaces and focus on convenience, cutting-edge technology and community as self-care.

Additionally, as more consumers prioritize joy and play, there is a white-space opportunity for wellness brands to adopt a less serious tone and lean into humor and silliness for a more relatable approach to health.

Proof Points:

Projected value of the global health and wellness market by 2035

\$12.86tn

WGSN forecasts that the global wellness market will continue to expand rapidly, growing by **\$564.08bn** between 2023 and 2035. (Forecast generated by WGSN's proprietary Total Addressable Market tool, leveraging Global Wellness Institute data and layering analytics to project industry growth trends)

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Percentage of consumers who consider wellness a top or important priority in their everyday lives

94%	84%	79%
China	US	UK

While well-ness is a key priority for the majority of consumers globally, it is especially so for Gen Z and Millennial consumers. (McKinsey)

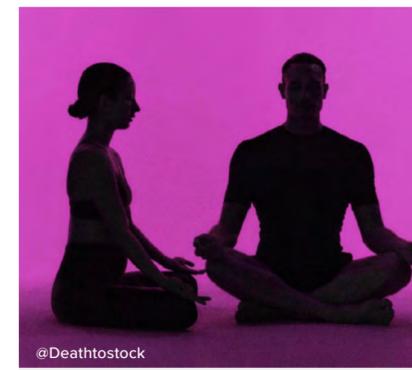
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Health is becoming increasingly at the forefront of consumers' minds. **60% of Gen Z** prioritize a healthy lifestyle over a career, personal enjoyment or money. (NextWaveGenZ)

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Mental wellbeing is front of mind for consumers globally, with **73.1%** considering it a top concern, particularly conditions such as stress and anxiety. (GlobalData)

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Opportunities

There is a shift in attitudes towards wellness, which is projected to be a \$9tn economy by 2028 (Global Wellness Institute). This is especially true among health-conscious Gen Z and Millennials, who are feeling burned out from keeping up with the cycle of wellness trends and are eager for a different approach – 89% of 13- to 39-year-olds in the US say they want the definition of wellness to change (YPulse).

As budgets tighten and categories previously resistant to inflation experience a decline, health and wellness has become a critical area for retailers to invest in, with global health and wellbeing spending rising 16% in January 2025 (VML). As consumers move away from “hardcore” wellness, the industry is ripe for innovation, particularly in physical retail environments, as the mental and physical benefits of in-person experiences lend well to establishing a deeper connection with shoppers. Retailers must recognize the importance of small, meaningful moments that can fit into consumers’ daily lives, whether through hosting weekly run meets or by positioning food offerings as beneficial treats. To succeed in this increasingly crowded market, winning brands will drive traffic to stores by delivering differentiated value propositions and broadening in-store engagement. This includes experiential services that are less driven by retail itself, and more by their wider value.

It's time to start redefining wellness as something more inclusive, playful, sociable and ultimately less serious, offering an antidote to toxic wellness culture and burnout. Help this cohort to find the funny, seek out glimmers, celebrate small victories, and embrace progress rather than perfection.

Key Strategies

Serve as a fourth space: As consumers continue to channel their spending towards experiences, they will seek spaces that bridge the gap between health and togetherness.

Integrate service offerings into stores: Invest in the creation of health and wellness-related services designed to support shopper needs while generating additional revenue.

Offer wellness-to-go: Tap into the growing food-to-go market, creating fun but functional food and beverage offerings that appeal to health conscious consumers.

Capitalize on the slow wellness surge: Connect with consumers who continue to spend big on wellness travel through adaptable and restorative experiences.

Unleash joy: Adopt joy as a wellness strategy. Let loose and embrace all things bright and cheerful to help consumers shake off their stressors.

Get playful: Utilize the power of play to bring people together, gamify fitness goals and create space for socializing. Aim for progress over perfection, making fitness fun and accessible for all.

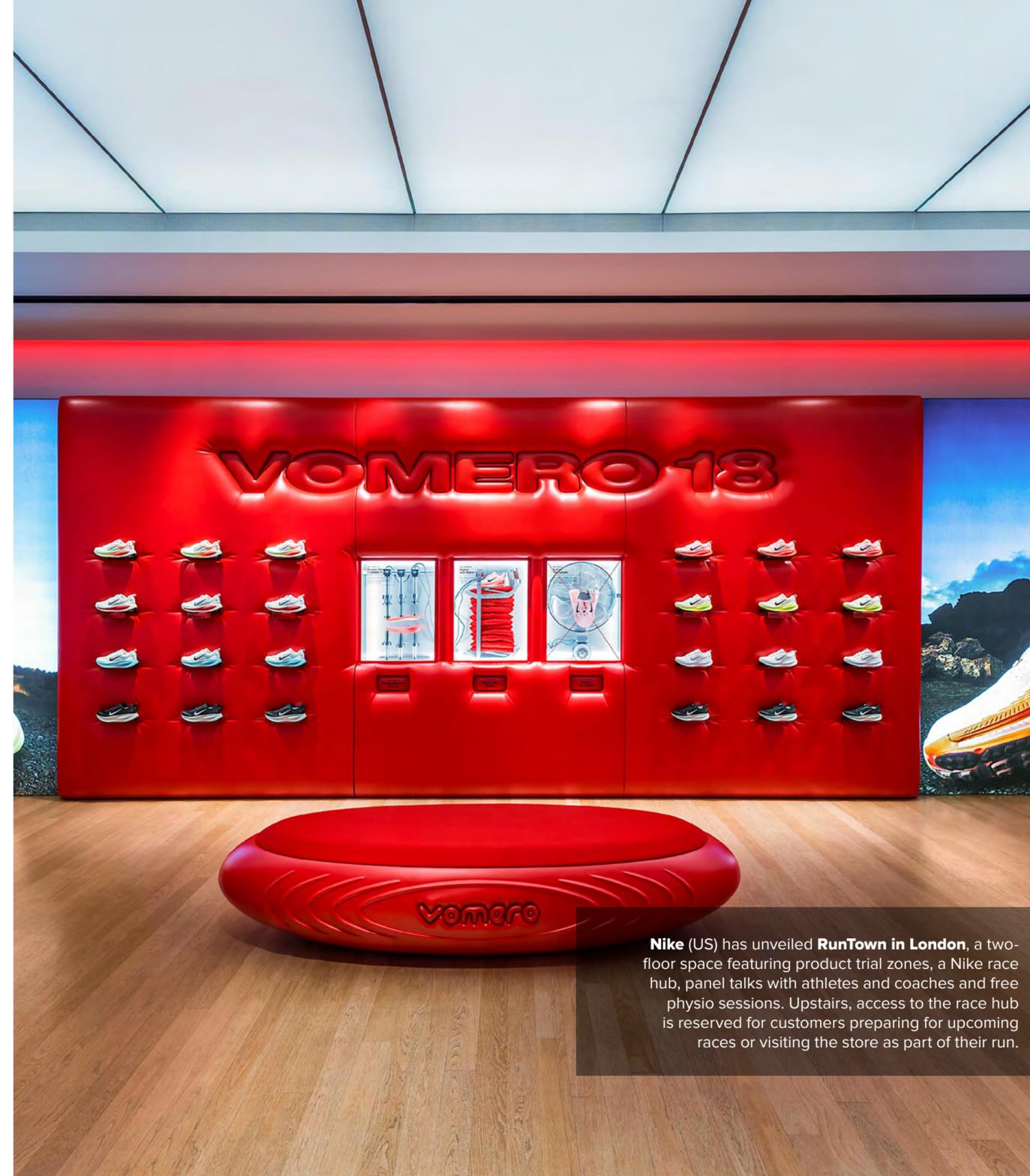
Connected Well-being

Key Strategies

Serve as a fourth space

Community has become self-care for consumers, transforming health into a shared pursuit. As demand for alternative gathering spaces rises, retailers can help fill the void by using their stores to foster interest-based fourth spaces, where purpose, health and belonging intersect IRL.

- Reimagine stores as social wellness hubs and create new social environments that encourage meaningful interactions to align with Gen Z. Address the lack of social spaces catering to their needs amid a youth loneliness crisis. While third spaces are built around convenience, fourth spaces are built around intention.
- Sports and outdoor retail spaces are particularly ripe for innovation as fitness continues to become a key driver for community-building and self-care. Carve out floor space to include areas for fitness classes, running groups and wellness gatherings. 79% of respondents in a global survey are drawn to events that mix multiple interests into unique social experiences, with running events up by 130% (Eventbrite). Remember, retail is no longer just about transactions. It's about experiencing and building relationships with a brand.
- Elevate loyalty schemes through exclusive in-person perks, using brand platforms and resources to host and curate IRL activities that connect customers via shared values and passions. Look to Decathlon (France), which will host a series of 5km run days across the UK in 2025, alongside offering participants exclusive opportunities such as product testing and the latest Kiprun (France) running gear.
- Cater to Gen Z's penchant for alternative nightlife by providing services that address the lack of late-night experiences, such as sober raves that integrate entertainment and hospitality.
- Feed into JOLO (the joy of logging off) by introducing elements and design features that serve the sole purpose of bringing people together, such as recreational studios, conversation pits, lounges and cafes.



Nike (US) has unveiled **RunTown in London**, a two-floor space featuring product trial zones, a Nike race hub, panel talks with athletes and coaches and free physio sessions. Upstairs, access to the race hub is reserved for customers preparing for upcoming races or visiting the store as part of their run.



Wellness hub **Othership (US)** is a body-positive, alcohol-free, supportive space that brings people together via social-first experiences. Located in Manhattan's Flatiron District, atmospheric lighting, cedar paneling and a 700 sq-ft (65 sq-m) tea lounge create a sense of intimacy and belonging.



Activewear retailer **Sweaty Betty's (UK)** Marylebone, London store hosts Barrecore and Psyche sessions in-store, increasing accessibility and bringing health and wellness services to more people.



Offering transformative experiences over transactions, **Vuori (US)** has been a pioneer of building strong community connections, hosting local events, yoga studio meet-ups, running clubs and wellness sessions like meditation and sound baths.

Connected Well-being

Key Strategies

Integrate service offerings into stores

In a challenging macroeconomic environment, embrace health-and-wellness-related services as an opportunity to invite shoppers into alternative parts of your ecosystem and generate non-retail sales.

- Drive convenience for shoppers by creating in-store health-and-wellness-related services that they can access while shopping. Extend the purpose of your store, increasing dwell time and driving traffic through exclusive services.
- Motivate shoppers to access these health-related services by integrating them within loyalty program benefits. This will help to make your loyalty program more competitive, driving affinity with members.
- Position your brand as an authority in the wellness space, supporting shoppers' needs by offering expert health-and-wellness-related advice through trained in-store associates. This opportunity is particularly significant when stores are located within "wellness deserts".



Rituals (Netherlands) flagship House of Rituals store in Amsterdam is designed to be a "holistic shopping and lifestyle concept". Consumers can browse exclusive collections before enjoying treatments, including massages and facials.

Connected Well-being

Key Strategies

Integrate service offerings into stores



Chinese grocery retailer **Pang Dong Lai** offers free blood pressure and sugar checks to shoppers within its in-store pharmacy.



Tesco (UK) is testing dedicated health zones where consumers can get advice, treatment and consultations for a range of health-related concerns while shopping in store.



The Wellness Galerie is a space within the Galeries Lafayette department store in Paris that brings together “experts in wellness, beauty, personal care, energy and sport”. Shoppers can choose from a range of personalized services and treatments.

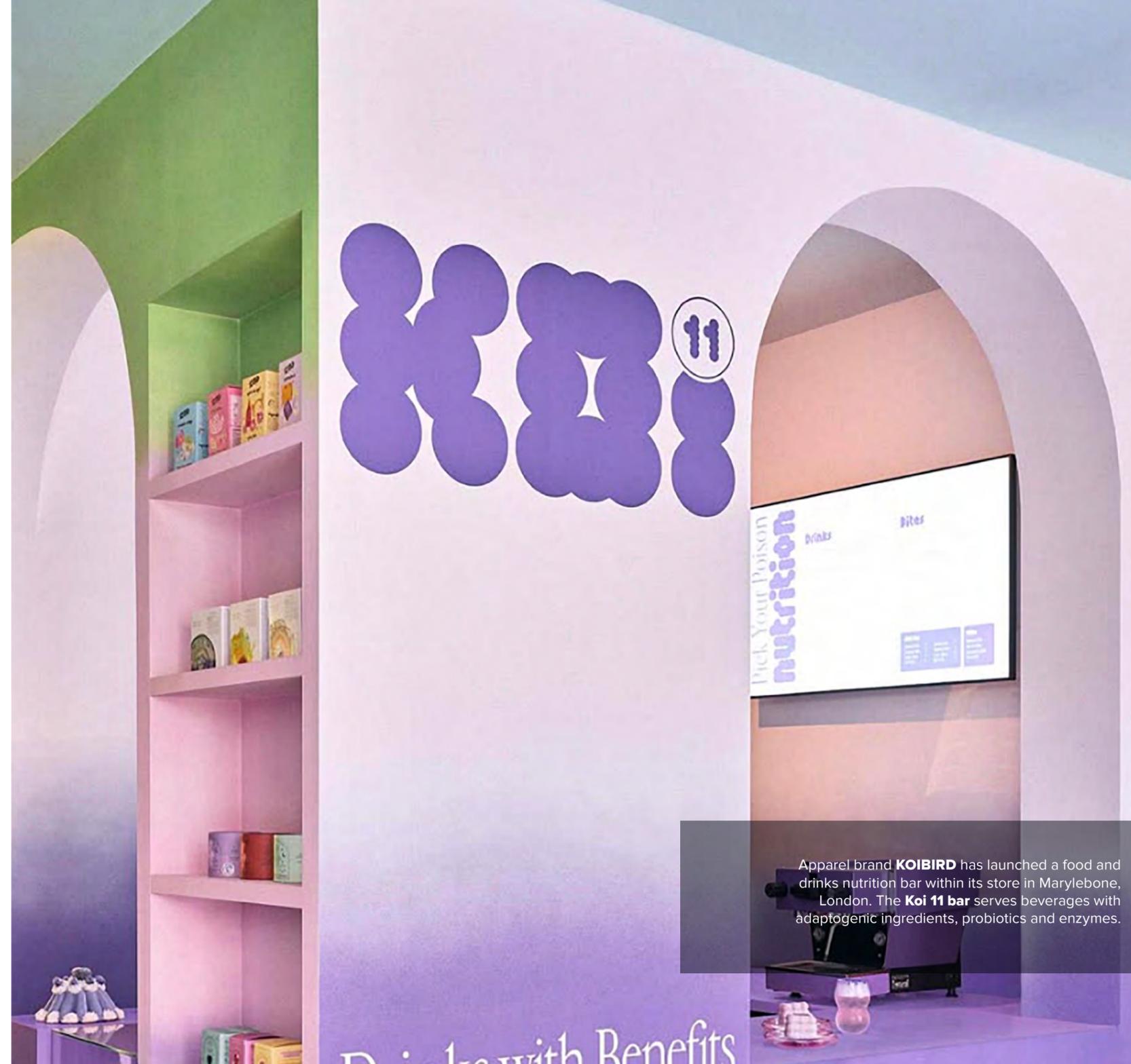
Connected Well-being

Key Strategies

Offer wellness-to-go

Invest in the growing food-to-go market, catering to health-conscious consumers embracing culinary-related branded experiences.

- Invest in culinary activations, integrating health-and-wellness-focused concepts into stores to drive traffic while supporting growing consumer affinity for social shopping.
- Design food and beverage offerings to be an extension of your brand. Lean into storytelling, taking inspiration from your products and collections when designing food and beverage offerings, and helping shoppers to understand your products better.
- Embrace consumer affinity for food hype, capturing shopper attention through innovative and emerging wellness-related ingredients. Communicate the health benefits of your offering to consumers to drive conversion.
- Seek cross-industry or cross-brand collaborations to reach new audiences. Consider hosting pop-ups that focus on fun, positioning products to be treats that will spark moments of joy while also being functional.



Apparel brand **KOIBIRD** has launched a food and drinks nutrition bar within its store in Marylebone, London. The **Koi 11 bar** serves beverages with adaptogenic ingredients, probiotics and enzymes.



The UK's leading wellness retailer, **Holland & Barrett**, has launched a new barista concept, **H&Bean**, in London. The takeaway beverages available have been designed to "mirror the latest trending health and wellness ingredients with scientifically backed benefits".



Daylesford Organic (UK) partnered with **DIRTEA** (UK) to launch three takeaway, supercharged mushroom drinks, available at its farm shops in London and the Cotswolds.



In California, US convenience store chain **Loop** takes a hyperlocal approach, differentiating itself from competitors via community engagement and regionally tailored food. Understanding Californians' desire for health food, Loop offers salad bars, seaweed snacks and chickpea crisps.



The Sporty & Rich (Canada) NYC flagship store features a juice bar that serves fresh smoothies made to order.

Connected Well-being

Key Strategies

Capitalize on the slow wellness surge

Capture spend from the swelling luxury travel and longevity tourism market through travel and destination-centric formats, as more consumers look to brands that can support their new goals around holistic wellness and longevity as the ultimate luxury.

- Design slow formats around the joy of the journey and invest in your physical presence via traveling stores that engage shoppers and drive sales. As the luxury industry faces a slowdown, wellness travel is driving luxury spending, being one of the fastest-growing tourism sectors. 24% of Chinese consumers have taken a wellness trip in the last 12 months as of Q1 2025 (Statista).
- Look to airplanes, trains and cruise travel connecting with on-the-go wellness-seekers. Smaller brands should partner with operators, such as in-flight wellness products or branded food and drink. Meanwhile, larger brands should consider full-service offerings like Australian airline Qantas' Wellbeing Zone and United Airlines' (US) Therabody amenities, which aim to make round-trips as rejuvenating as possible.
- Test desirability in high-commuter areas via vending machines before expanding into new markets. Look to recovery tech brand Therabody (UK), which installed its first vending machine at the San Francisco International Airport, stocked with massage guns and recovery devices.

Fashion retailer **Michael Kors** (US) launched a multi-sensory lifestyle pop-up featuring a boating experience and afternoon tea set against the serene backdrop of Hangzhou's iconic West Lake Scenic Area in China.



Dior (France) has a long-term partnership with luxury train operator Belmond's Eastern & Oriental Express for Dior Spa, an on-train wellness experience featuring Dior Prestige products and furnishings.



Blue World Voyages (US) offers a sports-and-wellness-themed cruise, with yoga and fitness amenities as well as air and water purification systems, vitamin C-infused showers and circadian lighting onboard.

Connected Well-being

Key Strategies Unleash joy

In an era of polycrisis and uncertainty, help consumers unwind and switch off from the stressors of daily life by positioning joy as a wellness strategy.

- Appeal to the Gleamers consumer persona with products and experiences that cultivate moments of pure joy and happiness. Tap into #littletreat culture and glimmers (micro moments of joy) to provide affordable, wellness-boosting opportunities that help them to slow down, recharge and tackle burnout.
- Look to cross-industry collaborations for unique partnerships and product offerings that surprise and delight consumers. Fashion and beauty brands can tap into food hype and unserious wellness trends to innovate around shape, flavours, packaging and textures.
- Embed joy throughout the creative process. Leverage KI (kid intelligence) as a design approach to create joyful products and packaging. Integrate a child's-eye view into your business, as French skincare brand Glowery did: its unique bottles and identity are based on drawings and Play-Doh moulds by the founder's young daughter.
- Provide a dopamine boost through campaign imagery. Use bold, playful colours and create scenes that feel fun and authentic in order to connect with consumers on an emotional level. In a 2024 report by marketing agency BAMB Global, 88% of consumers said experiencing joy is important for their wellbeing.

Skincare brand **Glowery** uses bottles and branding inspired by children's drawings and Play-Doh, infusing products with playful, kid-intelligent design.



Alcohol brand **Malibu** taps into the joy of clocking off with its latest ad featuring actor Brian Cox rollerskating his way out of the office.



Bodycare brand **Sundae Body** (Australia) creates joyful moments and playful product design through its nostalgic imagery and food-inspired formats.



Blank Street's (US) Press for Picnic activation surprised consumers with free picnic kits to celebrate and encourage spontaneous spring moments.

Connected Well-being

Key Strategies Get Playful

Invest in the power of play to promote wellness for all ages. Look to fun formats, gamification and little wins to incentivise consumers, focusing on progress over perfection and the benefits of social wellness.

- Gamify wellness, using play to incentivize users on their fitness journey while also building brand loyalty. This is particularly key for engaging with Gen Alpha in the wellness space. In a survey that asked Alphas what brand experiences they would enjoy the most, 53% said “games and apps that teach me useful skills”. (Razorfish)
- Tackle loneliness and build community through social wellness events. Make space for people to connect offline and highlight the performance and wellbeing benefits of group exercise and time spent outdoors. Strava’s 2024 Year in Sport report revealed that when people participated in group activities such as runs, bike rides and hikes with more than 10 people, there was a 40% average increase in activity length compared to when doing it solo.
- Make play a core business strategy, using it as a tool to solve issues around wellness accessibility and inclusivity. Ensure an intergenerational approach to wellness that focuses on play for all, and progress over perfection, when it comes to fitness and wellbeing goals. Consider rebranding the workout a ‘play-out’, taking the lead from Darryl Edwards, founder of the Primal Play Method (UK).
- For wellness products, look to #playfulpackaging and engaging product design with formats that blend fun with function. Explore how your products can promote open-ended play and fuel the imagination.
- Partner with toy and gaming brands for playful cross-industry collaborations. This will not only appeal to Gen Alpha but also to kidult consumers. Look to familiar characters and brand mascots to tap into toy fandoms and add a layer of nostalgia. Nike and LEGO’s new brand partnership is based on a “shared commitment to sport and creativity”. Championing the importance of play, it will focus on immersive experiences and co-branded product lines.

Touch Grass is a new app designed to help users take a mindful break from their phones. To regain access, users must go outside and physically touch grass before being able to log back in



Nike’s Playground for All in Seoul is a supportive, inclusive space for everyone to enjoy the benefits of play and sports



Korean skincare brand **Laneige** used a playful gameshow format called If You Know You Know to promote its Water Bank Cream Moisturiser. Featuring actor Sydney Sweeney playing multiple characters, the quiz questions made product education easily digestible and fun



Activewear brand **On** (Switzerland) launched a new campaign called Soft Wins, featuring Sesame Street’s Elmo to promote running for all



Skincare brand **Starface** (US) included a pop-out board game within its packaging, encouraging people to play along with friends

The Convenience Paradox

Addressing contradictory consumer demands

Retailers are navigating a new era of paradoxes in convenience, where success depends on balancing seemingly contradictory consumer demands. The future of convenience is not just about being the fastest or most tech-forward, but about creating experiences that are both frictionless and emotionally resonant, everywhere and anywhere—without overwhelming the customer.



Amazon Prime offers the option to select No-Rush delivery at checkout. This slower delivery option earns shoppers digital rewards. The retailer is also experimenting with slower delivery timelines of between one to two weeks through the launch of its low-priced Temu competitor platform, Amazon Haul.

The Convenience Paradox

Need to Know

Understanding the Paradox:

Winning in convenience now means mastering these paradoxes—offering speed and patience, digital and human, wide-ranging access and curated simplicity. The brands that succeed will be those that can flex between these modes, personalizing the journey for each customer and ensuring that convenience never comes at the cost of emotional connection or brand trust.

FAST & SLOW

While immediacy and rapid delivery remain dominant drivers (90% of REWE Pick&Go shoppers rate checkout-free as significantly faster), there is a growing cohort of “patient shoppers” who value slower, more considered experiences. Retailers like Amazon and Waitrose now offer both rapid and “no-rush” delivery options, rewarding those who choose slower timelines with perks or social experiences. In-store, the coexistence of self-checkout and traditional, human-manned checkouts caters to both speed-seekers and those craving social interaction or a sense of community. This duality is essential as some consumers want to “get in and out,” while others value the human touch and personal engagement of the shopping experience.

TECH-FORWARD & EMOTIONALLY CONNECTED

The integration of AI, AR, and spatial computing is transforming retail into seamless, hyper-personalized journeys. However, as digital fatigue rises, consumers are also seeking tactile, real-world experiences and authentic human connection. The most successful strategies allow customers to opt in or out of tech layers, blending invisible wayfinding and digital enhancements with calming, sensory-rich environments and opportunities for genuine interaction with staff or community members.

SHOP EVERYWHERE, NOT OVERLOAD

Omnichannel is evolving into “omnichannel optionality,” where consumers expect to shop across physical, digital, and social platforms—but on their own terms. The challenge is to provide access everywhere (in-store, online, social, mobile) while curating the experience to avoid endless choice, decision fatigue, or algorithmic overload. This means designing clear, intuitive store layouts, simplifying digital journeys, and giving customers control over how much tech or personalization they want to engage with.

FRICTIONLESS YET REASSURING

As retail becomes more automated and checkout-free, there is a risk of losing the emotional assurance that comes from human service. The paradox is that the more seamless and invisible the tech, the more important it is to build in moments of emotional comfort, trust, and community—whether through staff training, social spaces, or initiatives like “Happy to Chat” badges for those seeking connection.

SERENDIPITY & PREDICTABILITY

As consumers become desensitized to viral recommendations, finding moments of genuine serendipity in the shopping journey will be critical for brands.

Opportunities

Addressing the paradoxes in convenience retail—balancing fast and slow, tech-forward and emotionally connected, and omnichannel access without overload—opens up significant opportunities for brands to differentiate, build loyalty, and future-proof their strategies for 2026 and beyond. The key is to design experiences that flex to diverse consumer needs, blending efficiency with empathy and digital with human touch.

Fast & Slow

Offer both rapid and leisurely experiences. Incentivise slower delivery with rewards or environmental benefits, while maintaining rapid fulfilment for those who need it.

Tech-Forward & Emotionally Connected

Use technology to enhance, not replace, human connection. Embed opt-in/opt-out digital layers, transparent AI, and wise tech that builds trust and supports emotional needs.

Shop Everywhere, Not Overload

Curate omnichannel journeys with clear navigation, modular layouts, and customer control over tech engagement. Reduce decision fatigue with simplified store plans and digital wayfinding.

Frictionless Yet Reassuring

Combine automation with sanctuary spaces, social infrastructure, and opportunities for community connection. Design calm, low-distraction environments and offer both self-service and human support.

Serendipity & Predictability

Engineer moments of surprise and discovery alongside reliable, efficient service. Use exclusive drops, localized experiences, and community tastemaker strategies.

Key Strategies

Meet continued need for speed: Retailers are leveraging high-tech fulfillment, quick-commerce partnerships, and enhanced loyalty programs to meet consumer demands for rapid convenience and quality.

Support the patient shopper: Support the patient shopper by incentivizing slower delivery through monetary rewards and sustainability messaging, while maintaining human-centric in-store experiences and traditional service options to foster community connection.

Maintain a focus on value: To combat declining loyalty and high inflation, retailers must adopt a value-focused strategy including competitive pricing, increased private label investment, and price matching to retain cost-conscious consumers shifting toward discount channels.

Provide a premium offering at value prices: To appeal to a broad spectrum of shoppers, retailers are bridging the gap between value and luxury by investing in high-quality private labels, designer collaborations, and elevated essentials that provide premium-tier “dupes” at accessible price points.

Invest in wise tech: To thrive, brands must combine human-centric AI and individualized engagement with immersive, community-driven digital spaces that prioritize trust and authentic connection over traditional scrolling environments.

Refresh stores with smart layouts and navigation: Modern physical retail should feature agile, intuitive, and omnichannel-aligned environments with clear sight lines, modularity, and decentralized checkouts to create a fluid customer journey.

Revitalize serendipitous discovery: To combat algorithm fatigue and revive the joy of discovery, brands should position themselves as local community tastemakers by engineering “meet-cute” physical spaces and offering exclusive “IYKYK” (If you know, you know) experiences that encourage consumers to stop scrolling and start wandering.

The Convenience Paradox

Key Strategies

Meet continued need for speed

Immediacy matters to consumers due to the continued demand for convenience, which is the dominant factor driving European consumers' in-store and online purchasing decisions. Winning players will be those able to meet shopper expectations in terms of delivery timelines.

- Provide shoppers with a choice of same-day fulfilment options including rapid delivery services and pick-up. Continue to test emerging technology such as drones and automated delivery vehicles to drive efficiencies within hyperlocal delivery.
- Facilitate quick in-store shopping experiences through the use of digital capabilities that enable self-checkout, including smart carts, digital handsets and apps. Sophisticated retailers continue to test checkout-less store formats. REWE Group launched its largest Pick&Go store in July 2024 with positive feedback from shoppers relating to the speed of the shopping experience.
- Consider delivery timelines as an opportunity to drive metrics such as shopper loyalty and retention. Embed delivery-related perks into paid loyalty programs to drive member spend.
- Brands and retailers without established fulfilment networks should seek partnerships with quick commerce operators. Those operating in India, in particular, must invest in this space as quick commerce continues to thrive in the market.



Recognizing that 27% of next-day delivery (NDD) orders were placed after 10pm, the UK owner of leading beauty and nutrition brands THG extended its NDD order cutoff time to 1am.



Over 30% of **Walmart** orders are from customers and loyalty program members who chose to pay a convenience fee to receive their delivery in less than one hour or three hours.



Amazon launched its most advanced delivery drone yet in Arizona, which is able to travel twice the distance of previous models. The drone enables the retailer to fulfill local orders in 60 minutes or less.



Ulta Beauty partnered with **Instacart** to launch same-day delivery in as little as 60 minutes from more than 1,400 of the retailer's stores across the US, integrating its loyalty program into the Instacart app.



Waitrose partnered with delivery platform **Just Eat** after the retailer's average weekly on-demand grocery sales increased by 140% in the first six months of 2024.

The Convenience Paradox

Key Strategies

Support the patient shopper

Alongside shoppers demanding speed, many are seeking, or are content with a slower pace. Lean into shoppers' willingness to wait by incentivising them through monetary rewards or access to social experiences.

- Reward those choosing longer delivery timelines at checkout through reduced delivery fees or credits.
- Communicate the environmental benefits of slower but consolidated delivery to high-frequency shoppers. Amazon Day delivery, where shoppers pick a single day of the week for their orders to arrive, has resulted in the retailer using 20% fewer boxes in 2024 (Amazon).
- Take a considered approach to the checkout experience in-store, providing traditional payment options for those seeking a human, social experience while shopping. Consider creating opportunities for community connection through the introduction of cafes.
- Closely monitor consumer perception of customer service as stores become increasingly digitised. Don't be afraid to pivot back to traditional methods. UK supermarket Morrisons decided to pull back on self-checkouts as a result of shopper feedback admitting it "went a bit too far".



UK supermarket **Waitrose** introduced signage in a number of its stores communicating that it will continue to prioritise the availability of associate-manned checkouts in stores, alongside self-checkout options. Waitrose recognises that while some shoppers enjoy the speed of self-checkout, others are seeking "friendly customer service".



Amazon Prime offers the option to select No-Rush delivery at checkout. This slower delivery option earns shoppers digital rewards. The retailer is also experimenting with slower delivery timelines of between one to two weeks through the launch of its low-priced Temu competitor platform, Amazon Haul.



In an attempt to tackle loneliness, UK supermarket **Asda** introduced Happy to Chat badges, indicating individuals happy to have a conversation in-store or during a home delivery. The retailer also introduced a Winter Warmer £1 meal deal, which encourages shoppers over 60 to come to the store, have a hot meal and socialize.

The Convenience Paradox

Key Strategies

Maintain a focus on value

Appeal to price-conscious consumers as shoppers have become less loyal to individual retailers and brands.

- Ensure prices are competitive, recognizing continued demand for value and less loyalty. A spending report by UK bank Nationwide reported its customers switching to discount supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl, with the retailers seeing annual increases in spending of 10% and 3% respectively.
- Prepare for a continued shift to discount channels and for these retailers to increasingly take a share of sales from other grocery retailers. Brands must establish strategies tailored specifically to the channel and ensure that assortments include entry-level price points in order to be able to compete with the low prices seen in discount supermarkets.
- Monitor the growth of private labels as sales reach all-time highs, with retailers investing in their assortments while consumers trade down. Establish a point of difference (such as communicating branded products to be more premium) to appeal to shoppers seeking quality at value prices
- Leverage price matching to signal to shoppers that you are competitive. Leading UK grocers such as Asda, Sainsbury's and Tesco have been matching the prices of their essential products to those in Lidl and Aldi.



Morrisons (UK) matches Lidl and Aldi prices across more than 200 of its essential items with signage in-store reassuring customers that they will not find the products cheaper at discount retailers.



Carrefour (France) is seeing price continue to be an important consideration for shoppers with its private labels accounting for 37% of food sales in Q1 2024.



April marked **Walmart's** largest private label food launch in 20 years as it rolled out its **bettergoods** line of "quality, trend-forward and chef-inspired" goods across the US. The private label aims to provide shoppers with an "elevated experience" at value prices.

The Convenience Paradox

Key Strategies

Provide a premium offering at value prices

Meet the needs of the broad shopper spectrum by creating a product that appeals to both the down-trader and the splurger.

- Ensure products are of high quality and communicate this through effective branding that creates a sense of elevated essentials. Cater to those looking to indulge in an affordable treat.
- Invest in the creation of premium private labels, a trend seen throughout 2024 as retailers sought to enable shoppers to access high-quality products at a value price point. Many of these products are dupes that consumers consider to be of as high a quality as the branded equivalent, appealing to those trading down.
- Collaborate with more premium brands and designers to create limited-edition aspiration but affordable assortments that drive shoppers' excitement.



The **Gap x Cult Gaia collection** was designed to bring together “Gap’s classics and everyday wearability with Cult Gaia’s sculptural and artistic approach”.



Sainsbury’s continues to see significant demand for its premium own-label **Taste the Difference** range which now appears in one in three baskets.



Walgreens’ premium skincare line has been designed to be “premium quality without the premium price tag”. Products are at least 50% less expensive than their branded equivalents.



The limited-time-only **Diane von Furstenberg for Target Collection** aimed to offer timeless pieces from the designer, with the collection featuring archival DVF prints at “exceptional prices”.

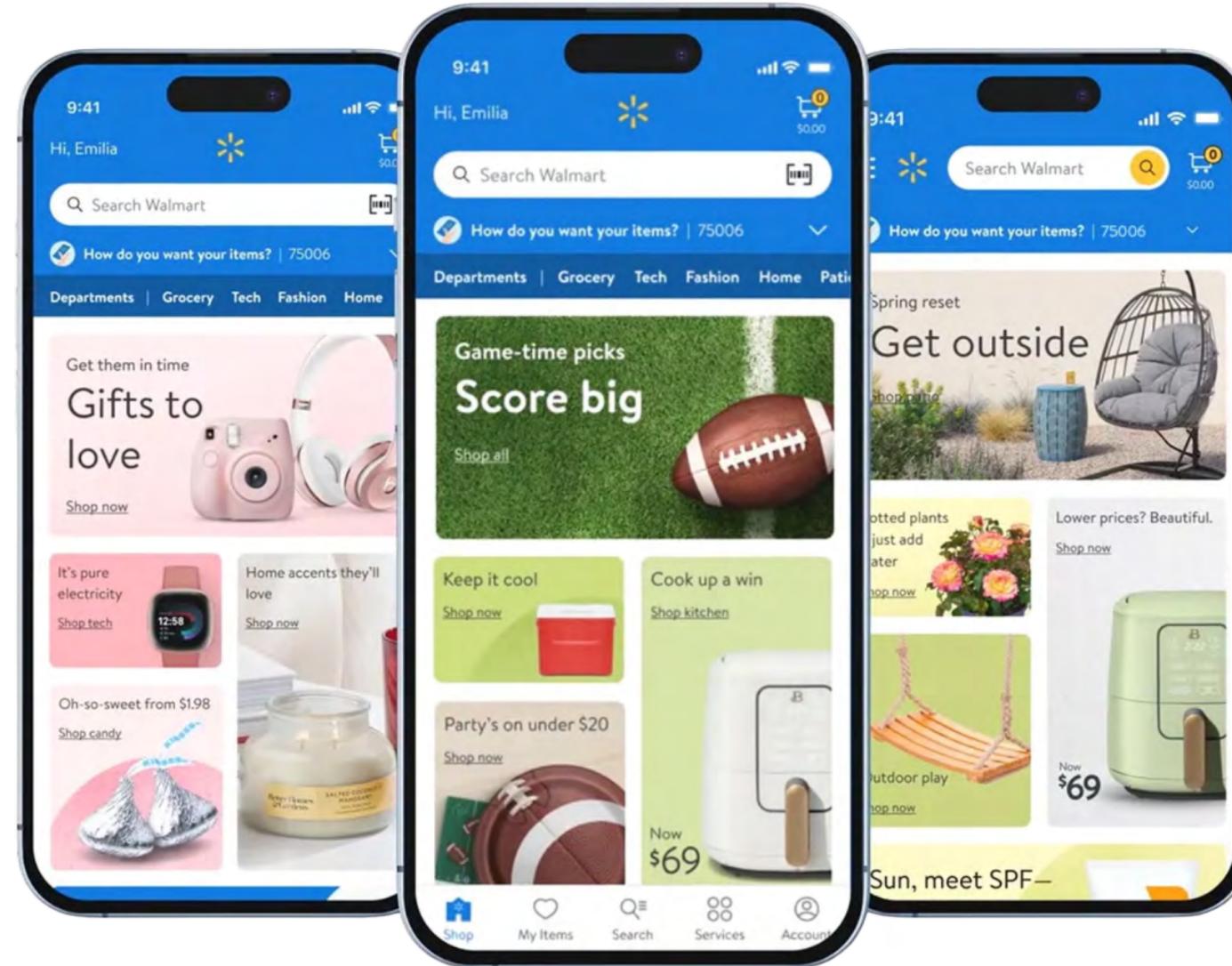
The Convenience Paradox

Key Strategies

Invest in wise tech

Embed trust and human values into AI as consumer skepticism rises in a digital landscape crowded with paid and fabricated information. The future of AI depends on technology that feels transparent, credible, and genuinely customer-facing.

- Shift from personalized to individualized, building individual connections between customers and your brand through co-creative commerce. Consider creating micro-community spaces for specific interests or leveraging loyalty programs to offer one-on-one engagement opportunities, ensuring these feel authentic and relevant.
- Listen to customer insights by leaning into niche communities to understand their passions and behavior. Think about how to offer meaningful tailored experiences, exclusive events or early access to product drops.
- Design curated, visually rich websites and digital spaces that feel closer to cohesive brand worlds you can explore, instead of mono-page environments that require endless scrolling.
- Spark basket-building and boost confidence in larger purchases through immersive digital content. Test image commerce within spatial computing. The rise of AR and VR technology—projected to have a global market volume of \$58.3bn by 2028—poses an opportunity for online retailers to curate visual commerce experiences within spaces like Apple Vision Pro or Meta Quest (Statista).



Walmart is accelerating its adaptive retail strategy, indicating plans to create a digital homepage individualized to consumers.



7-Eleven has launched an AI-powered self checkout store within an MRT station in Singapore. Shoppers scan their debit card to enter the store before picking up their chosen items and leaving through a turnstile with no need to check out.



During the 2024 Holiday season, **Target** debuted an AI-powered personalized gift finder on its app and website, providing recommendations based on factors such as age, hobbies and favorite brands.



In May 2024, **Reebok** launched a generative AI design tool that allows users to create unique patterns for classic Reebok sneakers.

The Convenience Paradox

Key Strategies

Refresh stores with smart layouts and navigation

As the physical store reasserts its value, the way shoppers move through space must be reimaged. Rebuild store layouts around clarity, adaptability, and experience, shifting from static floor plans to agile systems that evolve as fast as shopper behavior.

- Move from complexity to clarity as shoppers increasingly value stores that are legible at a glance. 92% of beauty shoppers want clear and intuitive layouts, while 87% want to be able to find products without needing assistance (ChangeUp). Simplify store plans, widen sight lines, demystify signage and remove deadends or clutter that interrupt the path to purchase.
- The next generation of store design will focus on legibility, modularity, and fluid customer journeys that seamlessly merge physical and digital navigation. Aim to start with the line of sight: reduce fixture height in the first 30-50ft of entry, reserve tall walls for perimeter storytelling, and place anchor beacons such as lighting, materials and digital headers at far ends to pull shoppers in.
- As the traditional cash wrap increasingly loses significance, decentralize the checkout. Replace it with RFID-enabled self-checkouts and smaller distributed or mobile pay points, which allow less room taken up by queues and more space for customers to move around the store.
- Even playful layout and zoning ideas, such as IKEA's viral "2-kilometer-long store" joke for April Fool's Day 2025 that was supposedly "impossible to get lost in," reflect a real and growing issue. Shoppers are increasingly reliant on their phones and have lost some natural navigation instincts. Retailers should respond by simplifying routes, straightening pathways, and using clear visual beacons to orient customers instinctively.
- Redesign the store footprint to align with the actual journey customers take, facilitating services such as pickup, returns and fulfillment. Even in traditionally warehouse-style environments, consider how omnichannel advancements can transform layouts. For example, Home Depot's Store Mode and Lowe's in-aisle maps integrate on-device wayfinding so customers can locate specific products instantly, bridging the gap between digital search and physical discovery.



When **Printemps** opened its 54,000 sq ft US flagship in New York, it worked with design consultancy L+R to develop a low-tech luxury navigation system. Rather than relying on bright signage or interactive screens, the store utilizes ambient digital markers and tonal cues to guide people through zones, making wayfinding an integral part of the space rather than a visual interruption.

The Convenience Paradox

Key Strategies

Refresh stores with smart layouts and navigation



Burlington (US)'s nationwide store-layout overhaul is moving the chain beyond its warehouse-style roots into a fresher, more navigable flagship experience. The redesign emphasizes open floor plans, clearer aisles, and bold signage to enhance brand discovery and make shopping quicker and more intuitive. Fixtures and department adjacencies are now configurable for rapid adjustment, supporting agile merchandising in response to trends.



Zara's next-gen store format is rapidly replacing traditional cash wraps with RFID-powered self-checkout zones that let shoppers complete purchases in seconds, speeding up the process and reducing queues. The result is a cleaner, more open store layout where checkout becomes an optional touchpoint, signaling Zara's move toward a fully fluid, data-driven retail model.

Costco (US) has introduced local in-store inventory visibility through its app, enabling shoppers to see live product availability and aisle locations within the warehouse. This enhancement hints at a future where floor layouts and signage could be optimized around how customers shop via phone, not just in-person browsing.



H&M has integrated real-time data into its visual merchandising process, utilizing heatmaps to understand how customers navigate through space and inform instant layout adjustments. Teams can now re-merchandise layouts in hours, not weeks, responding to local sales and shopper trends. In one instance, a simple window adjustment resulted in 132 sales in a single day. This approach demonstrates a new model for agile zoning tied directly to live data.

The Convenience Paradox

Key Strategies

Revitalize serendipitous discovery

Build local relevance with consumers who are hungry for surprise and unpredictability in the shopping journey. According to American Express, Gen Z and Millennials are swiping less and strolling more. 90% of young consumers in the US discovered a small business simply by wandering their neighborhoods, outranking the 80% who find new stores via social media. This bodes well for hyperlocal businesses, as 86% of owners say they rely on community support to thrive.

- Engineer “meet-cute” spaces, a new iteration of community-focused retail that appeals to the demand for social and interest-based activities. Offer ‘meet zones’ via contemplative corners, cafes, reading nooks or other mindful store design elements that enable moments of rest and socialization.
- Build ecosystems that exist outside algorithms by creating intentional retail environments and services. Amid an endless trend cycle, retailers have become victims of clout and the crowd, or rather, the algorithm shaping the crowd.
- As consumers push back against copy culture, a rise in gatekeeping is emerging. On TikTok, Gatekeep has amassed more than 73.8m posts as consumers look to reclaim their favorite products and spaces.
- Lean into members-only services to build buzz and brand affinity. Trial new spaces, experiences or products centered on exclusivity, such as IYKYK merch or product Easter eggs to offer fresh ways for people to discover and experience items.

MILE is a new members-only fashion app that requires an application for access. Approved users can choose from three tiers to explore apparel from luxury and emerging brands.



Paris-based fashion retailer **Alaïa** opened a bookstore and cafe on the second floor of its store on London's New Bond Street, serving as a cultural hangout with a sense of sanctuary.



In the book “Filterworld”, author Kyle Chayka argues how algorithms have led to a flattening of culture and commerce. As viral products and stores become more accessible via social media, consumers and brands being part of a community has never been more important. However, there's a counter-movement rooted in keeping local nuance firmly off the social media grid, making it important for brands to show up authentically.



The Post in Montecito, California is a new luxury shopping development that will only offer under-the-radar, local brands, distinguishing it from competitors like Rodeo Drive.

