

EXPERIENCE INTELLIGENCE

BY GPJ

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Retailers are building brand loyalty with fan-centric, wellness, and blind box experiences, while big box stores experiment with AI for automated efficiency.



Retail goes all in on experiential



AI-infused retail experiences expand beyond e-commerce and digital



Treasure hunting consumers fuel a "blind box" craze



Wellness retail turns stores into experiential sanctuaries



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Retail goes **all in on experiential**

Brands are using experiences to transform transactional relationships into lasting brand loyalty.

Retailers now rank among the [top spenders](#) in experiential marketing – a shift fueled by consumers craving real-life connections and IRL brand experiences that build off online engagement. To cater to the craving, brands are offering unique, often ephemeral and thematic, experiences. Examples include [Louis Vuitton's Shanghai Cruise-shaped Flagship](#), Selfridges' fan-centric [F1](#) and [Black Sabbath](#) displays, and the first official [Tomorrowland store](#) in Ibiza where devotees of the EDM festival franchise can get Tomorrowland tattoos and limited-edition merch.

What it Means

Millennial and Gen Z consumers are seeking emotional connections and authenticity through experiences that allow them to "step into" a brand's world. Even non-retail brands, like the [Netflix House](#), are immersing fans in their favourite stories with communal, shared experiences.

Key Takeaway | In-person experiences are a differentiator for retailers. As online shopping and AI reshape consumer touchpoints, human moments of connection stand out with prominent brands, like Anthropologie, emphasising "[connection over conversion](#)." Retailers investing in immersive, real-world engagement win not just transactions, but deeper cultural relevance and loyalty.





AI-infused retail experiences expand beyond e-commerce and digital

Retailers are introducing more AI tools in physical stores.

AI in retail has been used over the past few years for back-of-house operations and digital/e-commerce add-ons. A range of recent news, though, shows AI stepping into frontline roles. There's China's "[Robot Mall](#)," where AI-powered, humanoid robots serve as baristas, shopkeepers, and even entertain with robot musicians and dancers. In Australian supermarkets, Instacart's "[Caper Carts](#)" use AI, cameras, and a scale to intelligently recognise items as they are added, allowing customers to track their running total, bag their groceries as they shop, and conveniently check out directly from the cart.

What it Means

These examples feature AI more prominently in roles reserved for, or at least overseen, by humans. They expand beyond more common, consumer-facing AI powering shopping assistants that personalise product discovery (like Sephora's [Color iQ](#), Walmart's "[Sparky](#)," and Guitar Center's recently debuted [Rig Advisor](#)).

Key Takeaway | Like self-checkout on steroids, these uses of AI test how far consumers are willing to embrace automation. Whether it's a novel "robot mall" or Walmart's **AI super agents**, these examples signal a potential future where even less human interaction becomes normalised while shopping at the grocery store or big box retailers.





Treasure hunting consumers fuel a “**blind box**” craze

In an algorithmic age where taste can feel predictable, blind box experiences offer mystery and genuine surprise.

Labubu dolls and other cartoonish toys are everywhere on social media. They dangle from [celebrity](#) bags and appear in [unboxing videos](#) that show the thrill of a rare or "secret" find. Despite [signs](#) that the Labubu craze is waning, the packaging of collectibles in sealed “blind” or “mystery” boxes does not appear to be fading. Many, from [Bad Bunny](#) to [sports cards](#) to [Disney](#), are jumping on the [old](#) but new again tactic, enticing fans to try their luck.

What it Means

These toys tap into [nostalgia](#) and [kidulting](#) trends that take enthusiasts back to childhood with Labubus, a descendant of Cabbage Patch or Troll dolls and other creepy-cute collectibles. In more worrisome cases, the highs and lows of the blind box game of chance can be [addictive](#), drawing comparisons to compulsive gambling.

Key Takeaway | Scarcity, suspense, and the chance to join a community are turning otherwise mundane products into sought-after experiences. Brands are using blind boxes and limited-edition merchandise to tap into this powerful emotional loop. The actual prize isn't even the most important part of the equation.





Wellness retail turns stores into **experiential sanctuaries**

Shoppers are seeking in-store wellness rituals, beyond products, for immersive relaxation experiences.

Retailers are reimagining stores as wellness destinations. [Erewhon](#) is offering membership perks like free monthly smoothies and exclusive access to wellness products. [Holland & Barrett's Cardiff](#) location features an immersive wellness studio offering yoga and pilates sessions, health checks, and free consultation hubs. [Nordstrom](#) has introduced an experiential beauty haven, providing services ranging from 30-minute to three-hour wellness treatments. These environments combine shopping with immersive wellbeing rituals, creating multi-sensory, restorative spaces where customers linger, socialise, and engage with products in a lifestyle context rather than a transactional one.

What it Means

Consumers are increasingly valuing [stores as destinations](#) for emotional and physical wellness. Experiences that integrate mindfulness, relaxation, and community engagement deepen brand loyalty and elevate perception. Retailers that merge shopping with wellbeing turn transactions into meaningful lifestyle interactions.

Key Takeaway | Shoppers no longer want to buy wellness—they want to live it. Retailers that embed restorative experiences, classes, and rituals into stores create lasting emotional connections, turning physical locations into immersive sanctuaries that extend brand value beyond products.





OUT-THERE EXPERIENCES

People, brands and marketers continue to push the boundaries of physical and digital experiences, with new and creative executions popping up across the globe.

Rowboats, readers, and rendezvous



At Audible's Central Park takeover, attendees explored three romance-themed worlds—riding rowboats, matchmaking with storylines, and mingling with “book boyfriends” IRL.

From porta-pottys to pop-up spectacles



Brands turn bathrooms into immersive stages for brand storytelling—from Lipton's ultra-clean VIP tailgate stalls to Disney's “Portal-Potty” speakeasy.

Fragrance meets fantasy on a scented stage



Drake's Better World Fragrance House turned perfume launch into an aroma-led narrative—with ambient spaces, character-led scenes, botanical cocktails, and scent diffusers galore.

Stay less, do more: Airbnb's new frontier



With its relaunch of Experiences, Originals hosted by stars, and partnerships at music festivals, Airbnb is pushing to be more than a place to stay—it wants to be part of the story.