

tunein

The high street

*Why the high street needs help
to find its voice*



So how can it change?

The future of the high street is a topic that has generated huge debate in recent years and with justification.

With many high streets having lost customers to more conveniently located and better served shopping centres, increasing online capabilities and retail parks, the humble high street has struggled to redefine its role. As a result, many have simply fallen into clichéd, repetitive charity and coffee shop hubs that do very little to serve the real needs of their local customer base or excite a new customer into coming to explore.

“When the greatest a high street has to offer is a generic coffee shop then you know you’re in trouble,” says Tim Valler, Retail Associate at Concert.

So how can it change?

Concert suggests a number of steps can be taken to ensure that the high street does indeed have a future.

Much has been debated over the role of the high street but given all the increased attention what exactly is its future and how can retailers themselves help to ensure it has one?

Liz Morrell, in conversation with Concert, finds out.



1

To assure its future a high street has to first define its role within the location it serves. “I think it should play a vital role in the community. It should support those who don’t have cars and can’t travel to shopping centres and should support those who don’t have access to online,” says Richard Fogarty, of Concert. “It should provide a social outlet with improved hospitality with more restaurants, cafés and entertainment,” he says.

But this also means tailoring the experience according to the customer base and appreciating that different generations will use the high street for different reasons, says Ian Hobbs, partner at the firm. “The retail experience has got to be smart to make sure it appeals to its users in different ways,” he says.

This could mean that a national broadbrush approach works best, tailored down at a later point to local markets. “The high street needs to develop a strategy across the country so that it gets the right type of footfall,” continues Hobbs, “The challenge for the high street is to try and copy to some extent what the shopping centres do.”

Define its role

2

Hobbs isn't suggesting that high streets simply copy the shopping centre or retail park model however, since that clearly won't work, but instead that high streets take the same overall focus on the high street as an entity.

"For example a shopping centre controls who opens the shops when. It's about whether they can develop a strategy as a group of retailers on the high street," he says.

This collaborative approach is one that is vital – since there is no single landlord as there would be in a shopping centre or retail park environment. "You could have landlords, shopkeepers, members of the council and people from the local community getting together to set up a plan that allows them to operate in a similar way to the shopping centres with a coordinated plan on the high street," says Fogarty.

"It's about owners and occupiers coming together and deciding what is best for the group. If you have strong leadership – from MPs right down to the local councillor they can massively influence what happens in that area," he says.

And such an approach then drives the enthusiasm which fuels change, according to Hobbs. "Some of the best examples of the high street where they are thriving are ones where people invest their time and effort on what's going in there," he says.



3

Whilst coordination, and a broad-brush approach is key at a high level, to be successful individually, rather than a template approach, is also required.

“There are something like 5,400 high streets in the UK and there isn’t one solution for all of them,” says Fogarty.

**High streets
have to have
their own identity
and their own
personality.**



Allow individuality

4

The high street of yesteryear ignored technology almost completely but the high street of tomorrow should increasingly incorporate the tech that shopping centre customers take for granted, says Valler.

“The internet poses a great opportunity for the high street. Stores are already close to people by the nature of where they are so they are great for click and collect. But it’s also about how you use technology to change how people shop,” he says.

This could include everything from self scanning as people shop to extended aisle options that allow the smaller footprint stores of the high street to more effectively compete against their larger counterparts – both technologies that are less evident in the high street than the shopping centre.

“High street retailers need to get tech right. It’s all about experience so if you could get my mum to go into a high-street store and try on a dress then you show her, with technology, what she will look like in different colourways and then use technology to offer other things such as a hat or shoes,” says Hobbs.



5

The space limitation of the high street is of course one of its biggest challenges. We have already seen how technology can help to combat that and retailers and premise owners can also use this to their advantage – further dividing space and bringing in additional interest to their stores despite their limited footage.

“If you look at some of the larger retailers they have a number of other services within their footprint and increasingly you will find that retailers try to maximise the footage so they have to bring complementary services into one space. It could be a bank in a retailer or an eatery concession within a store but retailers are looking at opportunities,” says Hobbs.

“It’s about how retailers use their property portfolio going forward via estate management either getting local companies to get in or getting smaller businesses to share space to attract higher footfall,” he says.



Sharing space

6

Crucially the high street mustn't over complicate its offer and, like the shopping centre and retail park environment, must make it as easy to shop as possible. "The high street isn't always a convenient place to go and shop so has to become far smarter on how it attracts its customer and how it makes it as simple as possible – for example around paying for car parking or letting people park outside shops on the high street for a few minutes," says Fogarty.

"It has to be about convenience and value because whilst customers care about the high street they won't care about it at any cost. Instead it needs to be a desirable opportunity and offer things that online can't," he says.

Convenience shopping is key here – and the main reason why retailers such as the large supermarkets have taken key, smaller units to deliver compelling convenience focused offers. "Retailers have really got to have the right solution for the high street," says Fogarty.

"We are seeing clients developing newer layouts to suit smaller store formats where traditionally they weren't developing formats to suit. The whole convenience store take-up is a great example of that. Big retailers are using the high street now in a different way and occupying key units," he says.



Making it simple
and convenient

7

To ensure a successful future the high street, as well as the changes outlined above, requires a continued investment from retailers large and small. “To keep the local high street relevant retailers will need to invest in it to create the customer experience that keeps visitors coming to the high street,” says Fogarty.

Valler agrees: “Retailers will realise they need to find a way of winning back customers from online sales and get them into stores otherwise they leave themselves more and more open to the likes of Amazon,” he says.



8

Crucially these steps all lead to one common goal, reviving a passion for the high street from retailers, shoppers and browsers alike. “There are some really good locations and some really good, thriving communities. It’s about celebrating high streets,” says Hobbs.

And, as mentioned earlier success should follow in those locations which unite with a single voice for the high street. “It’s the high streets without a cooperative voice who will go into decline. The ones that have a voice will flourish,” says Fogarty.

It’s time for the high street to be heard – and to shout loudly and proudly about its future.



Reviving passion

Will well work?

The retail sector has so much opportunity for growth, change and positive disruption.
With that in mind here are a few of our key considerations for our retail clients...



THE BIGGER PLAN



THE PARKING PINCH



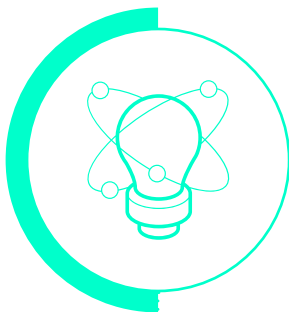
COMMUNITY



**TECHNOLOGY
AS AN ENABLER**



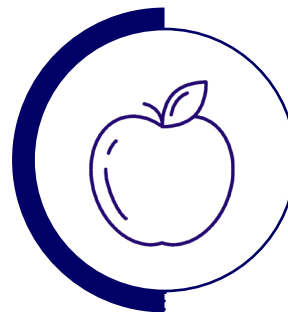
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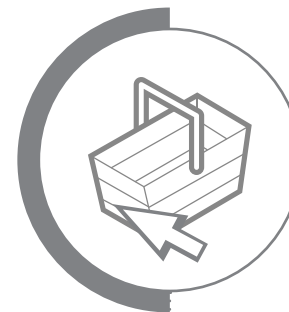
FIND YOUR USP



POP-UPS



FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD



CLICK AND COLLECT



LEISURE

1 / Consider the bigger plan

Address the issues on the high street in close collaboration with all parties, i.e councils, local retailers, as well as the larger merchants, landowners and developers to work together and create an overall strategy to secure the prosperity of their town.

2 / The parking pinch

Car parking is always a contentious issue and a holistic view is required on a number of levels, from the total number of available spaces to the pedestrian experience and provision of public transport.

3 / Community

Community is the essence of our high streets and almost impossible to replicate in a contrived shopping centre environment. This needs to be made more of through retail strategies that offer a range of services and engagement with the community.

4 / Technology as an enabler

The different available tech needs to enhance the shopping experience. Be it beacons that alert you to great offers or parking spaces or maybe apps that work with 'Click & Collect' to ensure the add-ons and extra value the shops can offer while in-store aren't overlooked.

5 / The mix

The demographics of different locations need to be considered to create a suitable offer, from local to global brands, in order to appeal to and meet the needs of that community.

6 / Find your USB

Examples of successful town centres are often those with a rich heritage but that isn't the only formula. Consider how the Tracy Emin association has helped to rejuvenate Margate and statement architecture such as the Bullring in Birmingham has impacted positively on perceptions.

7 / Pop-ups

These are a quick and cost effective way to enliven a tired town centre, as well as a low-risk, low-cost vehicle that allows a retailer to test the suitability of a specific market for a permanent offer.

8 / Food glorious food

We all need to eat and the right food and beverage mix will give more people more reasons to visit high streets. Restaurants, bars and cafés serve a social experience as well as food & drink.

9 / Click and collect

Engaging and collaborating with the online offer is vital. High street pick-up points encourage the online shopper to leave the laptop and mobile and head into stores.

10 / Leisure

Considering the potential for a complete leisure experience means including boutique specialist gyms, hair salons and nail bars, among other things.

Contributor

Liz Morrell

Journalist

Liz Morrell is an experienced retail and business journalist and copywriter with nearly twenty years experience in the retail sector and a serious love of shopping. She worked on leading business magazine Retail Week for nine years and was features editor for the magazine before leaving to have children and upping sticks to Bristol.

She has been freelance for the past ten years, working for a variety of magazines, corporate clients and other businesses in the retail, property, technology and HR sectors. She's also a research editor for Internet Retailing and currently interim editor for [foreDelivery.net](#). She loves all things retail. Sadly her bank manager doesn't share her passion.

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