



'We started Superette with the vision that buying recreational cannabis can be as fun as it is to consume it,' says CEO Mimi Lam.

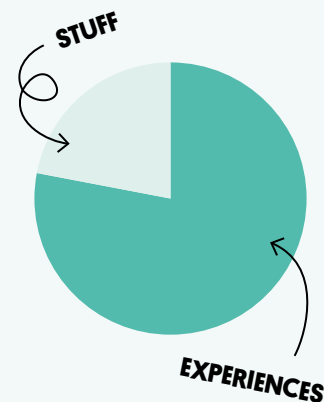
and movement. It's being tapped by giant brands, such as toy manufacturer LEGO, which opened the first of its experiential sites in New York City in June 2021, a model that it hopes to export to 100 more cities across the world. The store immerses shoppers and their real-life LEGO builds in the virtual world in its Brick Lab, tells tales of LEGO product development at the Storytelling Table, and allows visitors to make a Minifigure of themselves in the Personalization Studio.

'Experiential is the most effective way to drive sales,' says Marcel Hollerbach, chief innovation officer at commerce software company Productsup. 'If you look at the big players, they're all starting to complement their online operations with in-person storefronts, so small businesses and independents need to reimagine the experiences they provide within their own stores to compete for foot traffic.'

But it's not just the big brands going above and beyond to captivate today's shoppers. 'Often, smaller retailers are able to be more experiential than their big-brand counterparts because they can move fast and be agile,' says Esther.

The Ottawa location of Canadian cannabis dispensary Superette resembles an old-fashioned diner. Clients enter through a tunnel lined with funhouse mirrors and choose from the world's largest backlit cannabis menu, discussing options with Budtenders on retro lunch-counter stools. Peckish customers can call a local street-food joint using the Poutine Phone.

Experiential elements don't need to be so elaborate, though. The architecturally stunning Paga Microroastery in Bangkok



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Online retail is everywhere. One in five retail purchases already happens online. Yet this trend is, in turn, driving up customers' expectations of in-store shopping experiences. To meet these expectations, brands are crafting original and exciting experiences across a number of sectors, in some cases even bringing entirely new categories into the mainstream.

Dr Esther Pugh, senior lecturer in business strategy and marketing at Leeds Beckett University, says that there's been a new yearning for experiential physical spaces since the pandemic. 'If consumers are going to make the effort to come to physical stores, they expect excellent customer service [that] is tailored to them,' she says. 'This might involve an education about the products, testing or trying them on or simply being able to touch and experience them through the senses.'

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EXPERIENCE IS THE NEW BEST-SELLER

For independent brands, experiential retail is becoming increasingly important. Here's why.

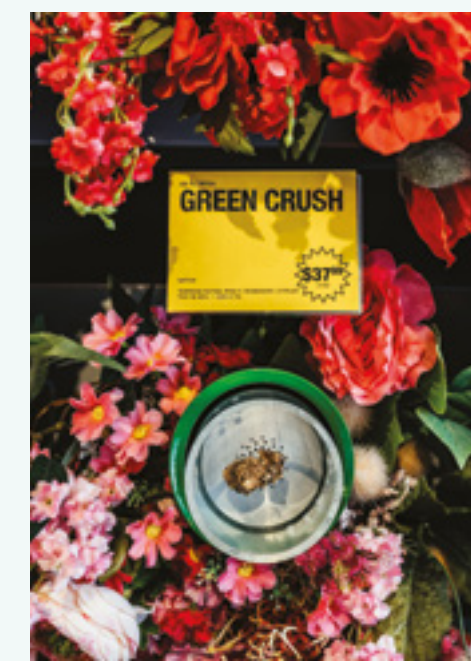
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features a glass-walled storefront, enabling coffee fans to watch the roasting process first-hand before they pick their brew.

In-store appointments are growing in favor. No longer just a tactic utilized by bridalwear brands, 34% of people said they're likely to engage with appointment shopping in 2022. Blue Mountain School in Shoreditch, London, is open by appointment for potential buyers to view its archive of one-of-a-kind commissioned works, from clothing to furniture and ceramics.



In North America, cannabis was first legalized for medical purposes, so early dispensaries were cold and clinical. Now that recreational use is increasingly allowed, cannabis stores are giving customers a more joyful experience. Superette's Ottawa and Toronto stores are colorful and bright with a retro vibe, and its products are marketed in a lush, nod-to-nature style.



REBELLE, MASSACHUSETTS

Subverting the stereotype of a cannabis dispensary – small, clinical rooms with little natural light – Rebelle's flagship store is in a 100-year-old farmhouse in the Berkshires, Massachusetts. Founded by Charlotte Hanna, who has a background in non-profits as well as a career at investment bank Goldman Sachs under her belt, Rebelle's focus has always been customer-first. Its spaces are intended to invite guests to linger, ask staff questions and engage all their senses as they browse. Empty packaging on the sales floor adds tactility, and a terpene (aroma-influencing compounds) table allows shoppers to test the scents of the cannabis before they buy.

Female-founded and minority-led, Rebelle gives back to the community, recruiting its workforce from disproportionately impacted communities and contributing to a fund working to overturn or set aside low-level cannabis convictions.