

LIZA AMLANI 

The Merchant Life

Liza has over 20 years of retail insider experience and industry knowledge in Merchandising, Buying, Product Development and Retail Operations. In her career, Liza has worked with familiar brands including Ralph Lauren, Club Monaco, Nike, Walmart, and several others. Her experience encompasses brick and mortar, e-commerce and omni-channel in the areas of product creation, merchandising and product development.

In shifting to consulting, she played an integral role in Accenture's Retail Strategy group, where she was responsible for consulting with fashion brands and retailers, providing insight on relevant topics such as speed to market and future retail operating models, supporting several major business transformations across product creation, speed to market and materials management.

She is a respected voice on topics such as responsible/sustainable retail, "The Future of Retail" and has led conversations on pertinent issues related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Liza is currently the Principal at Retail Strategy Group; a consulting practice which helps companies in the retail space dramatically improve profitability.

You can find Liza on all social platforms under the @theMerchantLife and follow her on LinkedIn for retail news from a retail insider.

Newsletter Link: www.themerchantlife.com

Website: www.retailstrategygroup.com

Welcome to The Merchant Life

For retailers and retail enthusiasts wanting the insider perspective of all things retail.

Now let's talk shop.

As retail restrictions get lifted, customers will start to enter the world like a bear coming out of hibernation.

They will be slow and cautious.

Will they buy anything other than sweatshirts and gardening supplies?

They will – if retailers get it right.

If the last 12 months have taught us anything, the only way to survive, is to be flexible.



Here is a list of tips to make sure you are ready for your customers:

1. Your customers are still shopping, just online. Make sure your product mix is refreshed and don't recycle your old inventory, passing it off as new. Customers will notice. Unless you are re-purposing basics or filling in gaps in your assortment with seasonless products, keep your old inventory in your stockroom.
2. Your merchants, visual teams, and sales ambassadors need to work together. All platforms, both online and offline, should have the same look and messaging – customers have been living in a digital world and they expect a seamless shopping journey.
3. Speed is key. Curate assortments that make it easy for the customer to pick up and make their purchase. Customers are still in safety mode and they are easing back into shopping in store.

4. Frontline brand ambassadors are the first faces customers will see as they head back into stores. Give your sales teams the tools they need to focus on serving the customer. Whether it's technology to check inventory across channels, video chat to connect with customers at home after the make a store purchase, or a CRM system to capture customer's data, equip sales teams with the tools they need to make serving customers simple.

5. Be kind! Don't give customers a reason not to come into the store.

We don't know what to expect or how we will feel getting back into the swing of things.

One thing is clear.

The store, no matter the channel, will always remain open.



Store Spotlight

Gotstyle, one of Toronto's fashion destinations located in The Historic Distillery District, has thoughtfully put together easy to shop mini assortments for their menswear clients.

The retailer gives the customer shoppable styles through their curated packages, helping them smoothly transition into a post-pandemic life and style.

www.gotstyle.com

info@gotstyle.com



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Liza is currently the Principal at Retail Strategy Group - a consulting practice which helps companies in the retail space dramatically improve profitability. She is a respected voice on topics such as responsible retail and sustainability, retail diversity and inclusion, the future of retail and the urgency of technology enablement in merchandising, assortment optimization and demand planning.

You can find Liza on all social platforms under the @theMerchantLife and follow her on LinkedIn or RetailWire for her POV on all things retail from a retail insider.

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As retailers shift to new ways of selling to the customer, implementing buy online and curbside pick-up options, surviving in today's retail world is like understanding the next Croc's collaboration. Almost impossible.

Many retailers have limited visibility into what inventory is on hand and brand ambassadors are fulfilling online orders while selling to customers in store. Online inventory doesn't match what is in store and frontline staff are spread thin.

To complicate things further, as we transition back into society, no one knows what to wear?
Is formalwear dead?

Are we going to live in our sweats forever?

What are we going to do with our Louboutins?

These are the "Post-Pandemic Pains."



As retail gets its groove back, whether you are a store owner, buyer or manage visual and sales, here are a few things to keep in mind.

- Reduce skus in your assortment and increase focus on seasonless products so that you have less to markdown. With stores closed for much of the last 14 months, inventory has been piling up and stores have been in sale mode for a long time. Avoid sale if you can and aim to be a beautifully curated shop that customers would love to spend time in.
- Remove redundancies and manual tasks in your day-to-day processes. Enable technology so that you can spend more time with your customers to better understand what they want from you.
- Upgrade your inventory management tools and POS systems so it doesn't debilitate your staff. Real time visibility to inventory is critical.
- Support your store staff and give them a break - they are doing everything they can to keep it together. Visit the shop floor, help sell and fulfill BOPIS orders, and get a taste of today's reality.

The fact is we are retailing in exceptional times.

We are still in a global pandemic and it is not business as usual.

Yet.



Store Spotlight

Brooks Brothers, a 200 year old iconic American retailer, became famous for its iconic shirts and business attire. The pandemic cancelled formalwear as Zoom calls rendered fleece the fabric of choice. Many retailer's faced the reality of bankruptcy as the pandemic questioned their relevance. Brooks Brothers could come out on top as it made a shift into comfort categories to stay competitive. The visual merchandising is a great reflection of what our lifestyle post-pandemic could be - a comfort-formal tapestry of jersey, stretch, and suiting.

www.brooksbrothers.com

Thanks to Jeffery Hall, Canada Merchandising Manager, LL Bean and Brooks Brothers.

You can find Jeff and more of his photos on LinkedIn: [LINK](#)



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What is the purpose of the physical store? If we can buy everything we need online, why do retailers really need a brick and mortar space?

Finding the perfect location, hiring the right staff, getting inventory levels right, finding the right store fixtures, enabling visual merchants, and so on.

It's a lot of work.

So, we pose the question:

What is the point of having a physical store?

If retailers think we are on our way back to pre-pandemic retailing, they are very wrong.

E-commerce sales continue to rise and digital shopping is clearly not going anywhere.

E-com is here to stay. There is no doubt about that.

It will also take a lot more to get a customer into the physical store than ever before. Online stores are open 24/7 and product comes right to your door. Your bedroom is your fitting room and you don't have to worry about anyone judging your clothing choices.

You don't have to drive to the mall, look for parking, dodge other shoppers, and sift through racks of clothes with COVID-19 protocols still intact.

Such a nightmare.

So why have a physical store?

The store gives retailers and brands a space to connect with the customer in a way that digital can't.

It is the heart of a brand.

And it's your money maker.

So let's pause for a minute and shift back to the rise of e-commerce. Are we saying that if you are a digitally native brand with no physical stores that you won't make a profit?

Not at all.

In fact, as e-com has surged, customers are still expected to make most of their purchases in-store.

The caveat?

Many purchases are digital driven in-store purchases.

Even digital native brands are taking the leap offline and there is a reason for it.



The physical store are where you drive delight. With the right investment and training in brand ambassadors that take customers through their entire shopping journey, from online to offline and across channel seamlessly.

Stores are a crucial piece in the retail puzzle.

And we need great people in the stores.

Thinking of the customer at the center of the retail end-to-end will get teams more involved with each other working towards the same goal:

- Serving the customer with the best product and service.
- Creating and designing product with the customer in mind along every step of the way.
- Collaborating with them.
- Talking to them...invest in them as they invest in you.

All stores have a purpose if they serve the customer with what they want, at the right time and in the right place.

The only way to do this is to be customer obsessed.

Store Spotlight

Cheerfully Made, located in Almonte, Ontario, had to change the way they managed the customer experience offline to online through the pandemic, store closures, and an increased emphasis on digital. Creating a seamless customer journey across channel with the very best service is what kept the sunny store afloat.

"We actively respond to comments and messages and make a concerted effort to engage with our digital audience so they can get that small shop experience however they are interacting with our brand. These efforts not only make these people we've never met in person feel invested in our company, but they also make our job feel so much more rewarding."

Emily Arbour, Leader of Cheer
www.cheerfullymade.com



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