

Transform Existing Formats



Rather than commissioning new store concepts, an increasing number of retailers are looking at how they can adapt existing formats. Ian Johnston, Founder of Quinine Design discusses why transforming an existing retail format might be a better idea than starting from scratch.

Retailers and brands the world over are trying to adapt to the rapidly changing world around us. There are severe disruptions all playing out at once, from the growth of online to supply chain and recruitment issues. These and many other factors are feeding uncertainty in an increasingly complex landscape.

Historically, retail doesn't sit and wait. The industry responds, reacts and picks up the pieces.

Recent technological transformation and changing consumer demands have driven many retailers to explore new retail formats. It's easy to understand the allure. A fresh, new format can inspire, boost your brand, your bottom line and possibly even make the world a slightly better place.

We get it. We love working with teams to create new retail formats. In good times, exploring new, alternative formats in different locations is considered a good strategy. However, when times are tough, businesses tend to think long and hard before deciding on their next steps.

While businesses adjust to digital transformation and omni-channel selling, their retail teams are desperately trying to figure out what this means for physical stores and the wider retail estate. In a rapidly changing climate, creating an operational model that works for the 21st century seems the most critical part of the agenda. An entirely new format may not make strategic or commercial sense.

Increasingly, clients are asking us for recommendations on how to adapt and transform their existing stores to make them more relevant, compelling and able to deal with the changes happening within their businesses. Transforming existing stores to...

- Align customers' in-store and online journeys
- Broaden the service offering (to include product care, repairs etc.)
- Accommodate new product categories or brands
- Integrate digital touchpoints
- Accommodate express journeys (return and click-and-collect)
- Add in self-serve touchpoints
- Remove cash desks to facilitate ubiquitous transactions/consultations with mobile POS systems

...and many more unique needs that existing stores require to be upgraded so that they're ready to face the new retail landscape. But, in order to understand where you are going, you first need to understand where you are now.

We always start with a Quinine retail experience audit, we tailor them to suit each business' needs. We look at what's working well, what could work harder and where the gaps and opportunities are. This provides clients with prioritised, strategic and tactical recommendations for the short, medium and long-term as they drive towards their future objectives.

Adopting a holistic view, approaching every challenge through the lenses of business, brand, customers and staff, means we can help clients understand the value and impact of transforming an existing format versus designing an entirely new format.

Here are some key areas where a retail experience audit can help you:

1. Identifying exactly what you have to work with - Your gut instinct is one thing, but you need external validation. You and your team may have spent years developing the current format and are so involved they find it difficult (if not impossible) to identify issues and opportunities. A retail experience audit helps you understand your current position.

2. Knowing the 'why' as well as the 'what' - The business has identified an issue using traditional retail metrics. This could be declining footfall, falling sales or low customer engagement - however, they haven't found out why these results are happening. To understand what (design recommendations) to prescribe, you must understand the causes, not just the symptoms. A retail experience audit dives deep to explore why these problems exist.

3. Using an objective eye to see more clearly - You can't read the label from inside the jar. A retail experience audit by an external agency gives you an independent, impartial expert opinion on your current retail experience.

4. Building confidence and togetherness - Knowing where you are builds assurance and alignment between internal teams and key stakeholders. A retail experience audit provides documentation and analysis (the tools) to help you articulate challenges and opportunities to your wider business, so you can win over people who may not understand the value of design thinking. This holistic view can help you to secure future budgets and plan.

5. Finding out whether your format is future proofed - Colleagues in product or service development have asked you to deliver a new offer within the existing store format. Where do you find space? What has to move, what has to flex, and what gets left out? A retail experience audit looks at how current formats can be future-proofed to accommodate myriad eventualities.

6. Prioritising interventions - New formats are expensive and take considerable time to develop and implement. Sometimes you just don't have that timeframe or budget. A retail experience audit recommends a variety of low, medium and high-level design interventions that can have immediate or future impact on your existing format.

7. Assessing how your brand promise is brought to life - When your brand has a refresh, it's essential to update in-store branded moments. With a renewed purpose, your existing stores should be a beacon for the brand. This could be just a new colour palette, logo, or refined brand promise. A retail experience audit explores how these can be brought to life in existing stores.

8. Identifying how your format fits with the estate strategy - Too often, new formats don't address the broader picture. They need to be value-designed and suitable for rollout. Retail experience audits identify key elements that underpin the design vision and make effective recommendations that don't detract from the overall in-store experience.

Creating a new retail format can make life easier. But life isn't that simple anymore. In today's climate, transforming your existing format may be a more viable alternative, with the potential to bring great value to the business, brand, customers and staff.

Expand the capabilities of your existing format, strengthen its operations, improve the overall look and feel, and ultimately you will create a better customer experience and increase your ROI.

Never underestimate the power of design thinking and the retail experience audit. These irresistible forces can transform perceived obstacles into clear pathways and greater opportunities.

