

# The increasingly relevant role of the flagship

By  [Adrian Morris](#)

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Long live the flagship store! The PSFK Manifesto to 'Reinvent the Store' (Retail Report 2015) affirms that the role of the store has not diminished as a result of the emergence of e-commerce...

Combined with the ever-increasing prominence of the experience economy, it emphasises the importance of retail design as a key contributor to brand strategy.

So why the need for a flagship store? Simply because a flagship store is potentially the most holistic representation of retail design as a contributor towards brand building.



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A flagship store is not simply about being a larger, better looking store, but rather provides an opportunity for customers to experience the brand in an innovative and memorable way, thus raising brand awareness on both a personal level, and more importantly, in an interactive way with the customer. Flagship stores offer the potential to provide the ultimate and most memorable shopping experience ever.

In order to fulfil this pivotal role in a company's brand strategy, flagship stores need to generate publicity. This is achieved through trialing new products, piloting new merchandising concepts, as well as acting as a platform for PR activities. Done well, this combination if executed relevantly, in an uber-cool environment, adds a new dimension of physicality to a brand that is inspiring and relaxing, and offers distinctive interactions which add to the consumer's perception and understanding

of the brand.

The ability of the flagship store environment to be flexible aligns with the expectations of today's consumers for things new and exciting. The flagship store creates a platform for experimentation and innovation, thereby setting the expectation from customers for these stores to be refreshed more frequently in order to remain interesting and relevant in terms of the experiences they deliver.

For many of the biggest names in retail, flagship stores are an essential part of their brand strategy, and are a critical component when entering new international markets. A flagship enables a brand to boldly establish its presence in a new market, making its status known through a physical presence, as well as to stimulate interaction with its desired customers.

In addition a flagship store has the potential to act as a hub for the development of relationships with customers, distributors, suppliers, landlords, franchise partners, investors and the media.

It's critical that there is clear brand alignment and reinforcement between the flagship store and the other ways that the brand communicates.

Key factors to consider when deciding the purpose of a flagship store:

- How will it be used to shift or improve the customers' understanding of your brand?
- How will it be used to gain additional customer insights?
- How will it be used to reconcile or strengthen your omni-channel strategy?
- What will carry over from the flagship store to other stores, and why?

With the emergence of new markets for global brands, combined with the ongoing growth of the middle class globally, the potential exists for flagship stores to be a strategic consideration for any mass retail brand wanting to entrench and grow its market presence. More importantly, the underlying purpose of flagship stores can be used to drive innovation in retail brands should they wish to remain relevant and engaged with their consumer base. And the future is not bright for retail brands which are not relevant and engaged.

## ABOUT ADRIAN MORRIS

Adrian Morris studied architecture at Wits, graduating in 2000, and then studied strategic brand communication at Vega, giving him the benefit of understanding design and architecture and its close affiliation to brand strategy. He worked at Old Mutual Properties Development division from 2001 to 2004 before becoming a partner at DZMSpace in 2004. In 2007 he completed a FMD at GIBS and in 2008 he became a partner at Design Partnership when it merged with DZMSpace.

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