

The future of retail lighting

BY PENNY JONES

As an industry under intense pressure from the jostle and crush of competitors in a busy marketplace, not to mention the evolving desires of customers, the smartest retail stores are realising the extent to which they can harness lighting to their full advantage, and put themselves ahead of the rest.

In August 2017, Arup published a thought piece called *Future of Retail* which looked at the big picture future trends associated with retail. It explores the impact of smartphone carrying customers and the merging of online/offline shopping. It discusses the nuances in catering for the needs of an aging population (slower escalators, rest areas and better lighting and signage) versus digital natives who expect everything on demand. It also addresses the sustainability question and how companies are responding to that and how new technologies (think robotic shop assistants and experiential zones) are changing the shopping experience. But, there is one thing it remained absolutely certain about: the physical store is here to stay, although the report says its form and function will see ongoing changes. It reports:

“Despite the global growth of e-commerce, most retail transactions are still carried out in-store. In the future, the physical store will remain an important aspect of retail strategy but it will need to transform in order to be successful. Physical stores will focus more on the

customer and will need to offer surprising and engaging experiences that offer something that online shopping cannot.”

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This is very good news for retail lighting design which, thanks to the LED revolution and the growing accessibility of control systems and automation, now has the tools to create just that.

Patty Tartaglia is a Senior Lighting Design Specialist with Retailite and has more than 35 years' experience in the lighting industry. Having worked with a wide variety of Australia's biggest brands, she says tailored lighting solutions are critical if you want to create the right atmosphere and influence how your customers shop. From brand perceptions to consumer engagement, she says lighting can serve to create the all-important *emotional connection* between a consumer and a brand or business.

“Some retailers, for example UK fashion and lifestyle shop Gerry Weber, have reported a 10 per cent increase in sales following a lighting redesign,” says Tartaglia.

“Great lighting is not only about how the customer sees a retail display or the retail space but how it makes them feel – with the effects being on a sub conscious level. Retailers need to consciously consider the use of light in stores throughout each stage of a customer's journey. The intensity, direction and distribution of light



Layering of LED track lights, ceiling cylinders and shelf lighting in Wailea Resort and shopping centre in Maui, Hawaii. Credit: Image supplied by Pete Miller



High-fashion department store Belk illuminates a series of five-foot square pillars with an LED crown. Credit: Image supplied by Pete Miller

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on the walls, featured areas and the general space has been proven to alter the emotional state of customers to be more relaxed, tense, and/or to create feelings of intimacy.”

The target market and what they want from the shopping experience is obviously important and Pete Miller from American lighting design company CBMC, who has over 30 years of industry experience, says there are three general categories when you’re thinking about the aesthetic you want to create.

“At the top you’ve got your Armani or Chanel or Gucci where the way the ceiling looks is as important as the look created by the flooring which is as important as the shelving and so on. Then there’s the second-level client who is both aesthetically and cost driven. And lastly the third client is more utilitarian from the get-go.”

Miller, who is an engineer and a Lighting Designer and Sales Development Manager for CBMC, has a sole focus on retail lighting and has expertise across small and unique boutique shops right through to 400-500m² large-scale high fashion department stores.

“A great case study of how interesting lighting can transform a retail space is one we did recently with high fashion department store Belk, where they wanted the maximum amount of lumen output on the merchandise. The store had these large five-foot square columns, just sitting around doing nothing, so we created an LED crown at the top of each column to light the ceiling which completely changed the aesthetic and made it feel much more royal and special,” he says.

Miller says the Belk example also epitomises one of the biggest trends he is seeing from a technological standpoint which is clients trying to have either the smallest aperture, or the smallest track head with the smallest LED strip light providing the highest lumen output with the greatest colour rendering capability. “The trend is towards very small and very powerful,” he says.

Of central importance to any lighting design in the retail space is what is called the Visual Hierarchy which refers to the way elements are presented or arranged in order to influence what a person sees first, second and third when they first enter a boutique shop, supermarket or any retail space.

The look and feel of architectural spaces and the way they present their offerings varies for every client and to create the desired effect Tartaglia says she always recommends using a high Colour Rendering Index (CRI) which will showcase the products and interior finishes as best as possible.

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Another factor at play is the integration of light for brand enhancement and using specific colour temperatures to create effects. Cool colour temperatures (4000K to 6000K) are known to convey spaciousness – supermarkets and pharmacies can benefit from this cooler light, whereas warmer colour temperatures (2700K to 3000K) can make spaces feel familiar and more inviting.

Tartaglia says clients often come to Retailite with their own proprietary colour temperature. “Brands are very specific about what they use

because it is part of their signature style. Health, beauty and clothing brands are predominantly 3000K, supermarkets and chemists use more like 4000K,” she says.

A case in point, continues Tartaglia, is the fresh produce section at Coles Port Melbourne where bringing out the fruit and vegetables true colours and enhancing their natural beauty was a key consideration. “Supermarkets, in recent years, have been putting greater emphasis on fresh produce to create a ‘farmer’s market feel,’ so we decided to light the produce directly from above using a higher CRI to enhance their natural colours and textures.” In addition, she says they relocated the lights, set new lux levels (from 700 to 1200) and set new beam angle distributions for dual layering which resulted in a modern look and feel, and drastically improved the lux levels on the produce.

One emerging trend that the experts say hasn’t quite reached critical mass yet, but will certainly do so in the future is the use of indoor positioning and wayfinding technology linked via Bluetooth or Visual Light Communications (VLC) to push relevant information directly to shoppers’ smartphones. All the major players in the lighting world are on course to develop their own interior navigation systems and the first case studies are beginning to appear.

Produce on display in Coles Port Melbourne is lit directly from above using a higher CRI to enhance natural colours and textures and give it a ‘farmers market’ feel. Credit: Image supplied by Retailite



Examples include the recently opened Ginza Six Mall in Tokyo – a 50,000m² retail complex using the StepInside indoor positioning system, developed by Senion, to direct shoppers to where they want to go via a smartphone app. Another is the 2015 collaboration between Philips and supermarket company Carrefour in Lille, France where an indoor positioning system uses 800 programmable Philips LEDs to send customers information about promotions or directions to products. The data is then used in analytics to assess store operations and the impact of specific marketing.

Tartaglia says Retailite is monitoring this new trend and is in the research and development phase of exploring VLC while Miller says CBMC have recently started an indoor positioning pilot project using Bluetooth in a large-scale sporting goods store in Utah.

“In our pilot the Bluetooth beacon is interfacing with an app that has been developed for that particular retailer, but I have to say that the takers on this technology are few at the moment. There’s a lot of looking, a lot of chatter, but I haven’t seen too many takers so far. I think this will change in the near future, however, probably starting with the huge stores like Target, who have that kind of “tech girth”, then, as the prices decrease, smaller merchants trying it out too,” he says.

Another increasingly important trend is that of control systems, wireless and automation and it’s definitely the most exciting one for Tartaglia. “Stores are able to create different displays for different environments. Retailers can tailor the light to create certain effects,” she says.

Miller agrees. “Scenes you would normally never be able to create in a small store are now easy to utilise, giving clients control over both the colour temperature and the output of all of the lighting to match the motif that they’re trying to show,” he says.

Both Tartaglia and Miller are positive about the future of their industry where creativity and innovation are at full play. “There’s no prescription with retail lighting, no template that will create the right environment for every client. What makes their brand different is our engine, and that’s what makes me feel good about what we do every day,” says Miller. ■



Kathmandu have focused on the location of displays and zoning which will help to ensure the integrity of their overall lighting design. Credit: Image supplied by Retailite

PENNY JONES

Penny is a freelance writer, editor and communicator with an unabashed passion for profiling the extraordinary achievements of ordinary people. She has written her way through the business world and is highly adept at teasing out the remarkable tales that academics and industry experts have to tell. She has covered topics ranging from the bionic eye, solar racing cars and kiwi conservation to polyphonic music transcription, mountaineering and straw-bale home construction, and much more in-between. She also loves nothing more than recounting a personal travel yarn or two for lifestyle publications. She has lived in the UK, New Zealand and Japan, and is currently based in Sydney.
pennyjones.writer@gmail.com

