



Offline // Online // In-line ?

Google Retail Industry Leader Peter Fitzgerald was quoted in the FT saying only a third of luxury companies had transactional websites, a third were planning transactional sites and the last third weren't planning anything. Read what Michael Sheridan has to say.

Historically luxury brands have been anti-internet, fearing customers would consider the internet downmarket.

But now, London-based luxury ecommerce retailer Net-a-Porter has shattered this preconception showing that consumers will buy high value fashion online. It is the unique editorial style content versus commerce model of this customer-orientated site that has given the consumer a more enriched shopping experience. This, coupled with some of the best fashion brands the world has to offer, has made Net-a-Porter's online-only retail offer such a success with the business acquired by Richemont, and valued at a huge £350m.

But it is this enriched customer experience that is too often lacking online. Real shops offer a level of multisensory experience and presentation that is just not possible in the virtual world. Online, as we know it today, only triggers two of our senses.

I believe, in the current climate, the customer experience has never been more important. Good retail design will continue to enable the customer to fulfil that all important emotional need.

Of course technology cannot be ignored. We understand that to deliver results for our clients, and in turn for them to fulfil customer needs, the customer needs to be engaged with a product or brand on many levels, and technology can act as this enabler.

Technology can empower the consumer, offering choice at their fingertips with online retailing, as well as speed of transaction, ability to find the best price, home delivery, all from the privacy and comfort of the home.

These are elements that have already been adopted in the high street, albeit on a very small scale, with the escalating use of digital technology such as RFID, Bluetooth and the advent of augmented reality.

Michael Sheridan
Founder & Managing Director

Technology will increasingly become part of the 'live' customer experience adding to the overall theatre created in-store, to engage consumers. Ultimately, combine technology with the in-store experience, so long as it is executed well, and you have a powerful combination.

Therefore I believe good design will continue to be a must-have for ambitious retailers – both in the store and in the virtual online environment. The store and the website must both succeed in fulfilling the same brand promise and a positive experience for consumers.

Only this week, a new EU ruling just approved in Brussels will give brands such as Burberry, Giorgio Armani and Louis Vuitton the power to stop discount online retailers from selling their products if they do not have "bricks and mortar" high street stores. I think this will enable brands to maintain brand credibility and continue to deliver on their true brand promise whilst maintaining that positive experience.

Last month, Selfridges took the plunge and stepped into the virtual retailing arena with a well received ecommerce launch. The fact that Selfridges arrival into ecommerce has caused such a stir underlines how few market leading retailers are left to take that step. Retailers that persist in only operating on the high street run an increasing risk of being marginalised.

Unsurprisingly Selfridges, which has long had the real world retail experience nailed, appears to have an equally firm grasp on its online presence. It will be interesting to see over time how this will complement and interact with the high street offer, and adapt with the ever changing enhancements of technology.

We want to know how you think the online and offline retail environments will evolve. Why not send me your thoughts. I would love to hear from you [\[click here\]](#).