

The Intersection of Health, Wellness, and Retail: Indulge, Experience, Connect

By: Sheri Blattel

Consumers are time-conscious -- *very* time-conscious. But at the same time, continually shifting to a lifestyle defined by wellness, self-care, and health and beauty. With the pace of life increasing all the time, it's no surprise that wellness is taking on a whole new meaning. Wellness as a priority is entering both the digital and physical world at a rapid pace - not excluding the inside of many brick-and-mortar retail spaces.

So how do today's retailers strike a balance between the seamless, efficient shopping experience and the need to slow down, indulge, and connect with the notion of wellbeing?

In the age of convenience and instant gratification, and a shift toward urban living, retailers need to find ways to maximize the time consumers spend in their physical environments. We see this playing out as the c-store and clinic become one and the same a la CVS pharmacies. But what does that mean for store owners? How does one make informed design decisions that satisfy the needs of time-deficient, wellness-oriented consumers?

The answer starts with empathy and meeting the consumer where they are, both physically and emotionally, throughout the customer journey. Understanding and agility together form the essence of optimal in-store experiences. And wellness is the main -- possibly the only -- driver, in an age of online purchasing, that allows for adding time to the shopping experience.

The wellness economy ([worth \\$4.2 trillion](#)) has been driven by the blur of technology, constant connectedness, and the pace of life online. An affinity for wellness drives the need for experiences, which, as a result of their connectedness to the consumption of wellness products and services, directly involves the retailers who sell them.

With the increasing demand for wellness, the expectation that retail environments will offer "healthy" products and experiences is becoming the standard. For instance, grocery stores are now not only expected to stock healthy, wholesome, organic, better-for-you food items; they are also assumed to offer fresh smoothies - think Whole Foods juice bars - seating areas for rest and relaxation, and even entire wellness departments where patrons can seek advice or stop to be pampered. As consumers, we're cutting stops out of our errands list, while still demanding

the ease and convenience of a seamless shopping experience, leading to a growing need for optimizing and multi-purposing retail spaces.

5 Ways to Incorporate Wellness into the Retail Experience:

Retail therapy is taking on an entirely new meaning - shopping spaces are now being designed to be modular, flexible, and most importantly, healthful. Careful and calculated design is fundamental in bridging the gap between retail and health and wellness. “The name of the game is now empathy and human-centered design,” said Cathrine Tait, architect at CTA | Cushing Terrell, “it’s fully understanding how the customer is navigating the aisles and being able to account for what that experience looks like - or how it could look.”

So let’s discuss five things every retailer and retail designer should consider when creating that wellness-retail experience.

1. Create multi-dimensional spaces



Whole Foods Las Colinas

A juice bar at the Whole Foods Market Las Colinas is a store-within-a-store option that gives consumers the opportunity to indulge in healthy eating while they shop.

Today, even grocery stores and other drug or convenience store options are looking to design to enhance the shopping experience for an otherwise loyal clientele. The convenience store doesn't necessarily point to junk food and cheap beer anymore; they are taking many forms. Convenience stores have adapted to encompass lifestyle perks - time-saving, health-enhancing features and experiences. Take, for example, the move by [Mall of America to open a walk-in healthcare clinic](#). The clinic will be available to both visitors and employees of the mall to treat minor ailments and address common travel-related illnesses. With its location inside the mall, the clinic is convenient and acts to layer self-care into the retail experience.

Similarly, beauty departments are emerging - or are being entirely reimagined - in what may be considered nonstandard locations. Even grocery stores, for instance, are compelled to add dimension to their health and beauty offerings. Some of these creative additions may include mobile or modular fixtures (think a vanity on wheels), which allows the flexibility of a service and/or product to physically, and quite literally, meet the customer where they are in the store.

2. Celebrate the senses - indulge in-person

Some retailers are taking sensory experience and using it to define their entire retail concept. This layering of experience can be accomplished in varying degrees, but always with the intention of engaging consumers on a personal and authentic level. In the grocery store beauty department, shoppers can touch, feel, smell, and ultimately experience products in the store. Greeted by the mobile vanity, they may, for instance, sit for a moment - a behavior, which alone is nonstandard in the aisles of a supermarket. Grocery retailers are including lounge chairs and flexible fixturing to encourage the shopper to leave the shopping cart behind and "sit and indulge"-- creating a store-within-a-store destination environment.

Other retailers are going so far as to make experience the crux of their brand's offerings. [Rapha Cycle Club](#), a bicyclists community and retail dream destination, has compiled all of the parts and pieces of an active lifestyle and housed it under a single store roof. The smell of freshly brewed coffee fills these "gear" shops while bicycle races are projected on in-store monitors. Centered on the physical activity of biking, the retailer is innately wellness-driven, but add in the appeal of taste, test, touch, and feel, and club members are encouraged to gather to watch live events, sip espresso, and browse new apparel options while they chatter about their latest rides.



Rapha

Blending fitness, retail, and community, Rapha Cycling Club has centered their physical store locations around wellness.

3. Carefully incorporate technology

Technology, of course, plays a large role in just about all of today’s environments. In our beauty department example above, we might see augmented reality used to enhance the shopper experience in the form of a “smart mirror.” [Walgreens is testing similar technology to guide purchases in their refrigerated aisles.](#) We’re beginning to see this type of technology more and more commonly designed into retail fixturing.

Such accessories as the smart mirror represent just one of many new ways retailers can actively engage customers with technology. But more passive tactics are also being used. For instance, in that same beauty department, monitors might quietly play tutorials or communicate tips and tricks, and “social media moments” are scattered throughout. The goal: to bridge the gap between consumers of all needs and demographics (including those who appreciate the independence of the online shopping experience) by supplementing the in-store experience, but not at the cost of the ability to touch, test, feel, and be pampered.

While layering in technology is in many ways critical to establishing relevance and intrigue, the addition of tech installments should be done selectively and strategically. [Consumers are still spending more in stores](#) because they value the physical interactions and the emotional gratification a brick-and-mortar environment provides. Whether human interaction or product interaction, technology should most often be used to enhance these experiences, not replace them.

4. Encourage social exchange

[Studies indicate that social relationships and human interaction are forms of wellness that may contribute to good health and longevity.](#) And while retail has historically (going all the way back to ancient marketplaces) represented gathering spaces, retailers of today must be very intentional about how they serve this purpose. Now that there are endless options for obtaining goods online, extra effort must be made to bring people off of their devices and into a store environment. This reality is forcing design appeal into the equation.

Physical stores must be more interesting than the merchandise they house. Often this translates to spaces that are designed with “social” sharing in mind. Spaces that are coined “instagrammable” are increasingly important as the social exchange that occurs is perpetuated beyond the store visit. Like [Glossier’s Seattle pop-up shop](#), whose interior is outfitted to resemble the local Pacific Northwest landscape, stores are becoming creative displays that encourage consumers to share their experience both digitally and physically.

With this increased attention to store design also comes the very intentional decision to incorporate various forms of gathering spaces. When social interactions occur, the payoff for visiting a store increases, encouraging return visits and the desire to linger. Stores now, like Crate and Barrel with their new [The Table at Crate](#) concept, center on sitting and socializing as the way to bring consumers offline and engage with them.

5. Make healthful selections

Enough cannot be said for making design decisions that improve the shopping experience from a personal health perspective. Consider the example of [Coated](#), the first clean-air nail salon in Austin, TX. The mission of the space is to provide a “full-relaxation” stay, but it was also carefully engineered to remove harmful chemicals, dust, and other toxins at the source - with systems that functioned at the “hand level,” without interrupting the service. This example goes beyond the product or service offering and enters even the physical impact spaces may have on those who inhabit them. This can be taken even further to include a heightened emphasis on daylight, overall air quality, and sustainable and nontoxic material selections. Decisions that are weighed heavily in workplace and residential environments could, and should, be considered with equal weight in all spaces, including social environments like brick and mortar retail.



Coated

Moveable fixtures and HVAC at the source provide ultimate wellness and comfort at Coated, Austin's first clean-air salon.

Creating environments that encourage wellness is perhaps the first, and best, way to incorporate wellness into retail spaces. Retailers benefit from the ability to market this detailed effort, and consumers benefit from spending time in a “well” environment. Everyone wins.

Goods can be purchased anywhere; experiences are the new allure for physical environments.

Retailers and designers must keep in mind the motives of today's consumer. [According to Eventbrite data, 78% of millennials would choose to spend money on a desirable experience over buying physical good.](#) In other words, retail is more than just the satisfaction of buying something new. It's community overlaid or interwoven with entertainment, food and drink, and social engagement. The store must possess additional appeal. And it must include features such as a shareable, Instagrammable setting, the use of sustainable and nontoxic materials,

and the flexibility to linger, connect, and interact, giving consumers opportunities to enhance their daily lives without going out of their way.

In an age of “there’s no time,” where personal and work lives blur, and everyone is “always on,” the result is a tendency for shoppers to seek unique experiences and crave sources of wellness. As a retail provider, you are in a unique position to accommodate both.

About CTA | Cushing Terrell

CTA | Cushing Terrell was founded in 1938 by a pair of forward-thinking, Montana architects who believed in the importance of combining architectural and engineering services. Since day one, the firm has strived to expand its multi-disciplinary approach and now includes over 20 design-related disciplines. Currently numbering more than 450 team members, CTA | Cushing Terrell has 14 offices throughout the United States. The firm’s retail work spans all 50 US states and 7 countries around the globe and includes 22 of the top 50 grocery brands. For more information, visit ctagroup.com/retail.