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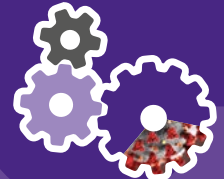


Back to School

September means back to school, even in our changing times. How did retailers respond to this annual event, and are there any lessons to be learned?

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INDUSTRY REPORT



COVID-19

Shopping during and post lockdown were strange new experiences for shoppers. What were their attitudes and in-store experiences? We find out more.

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The UK electronics industry is huge. With such a wide range of choice, how do shoppers decide where and when to shop?

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Contactless Retail

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Welcome to your latest issue of *In-Store Insights*

Although this has been a year of change, one tradition which has held has been 'back to school', with pupils returning to classes in September after the lockdown and summer break. While children are having to adjust and adapt to changes, parents and carers across the nation faced the usual summer challenge, the back to school shopping. How did retailers deal with this time-honoured annual event, albeit with a 2020 twist? Our **Storedits** on [page 5](#) explores further.

And there's still no getting away from COVID-19, as it continues to dominate almost every aspect of our lives. Retail was a big part of these changes, and we wanted to find out what the lockdown had meant for shoppers. Our **Industry Report** on [page 9](#) takes a deep dive into shopping attitudes and experiences both during and post lockdown.

Moving back into more familiar territory... our **Shopper Investigation** on [page 13](#) examines the colossal category that is electronics. From fridges to floorcare, hair dryers to heaters, these products really do feature heavily in our everyday lives. But with so many retailers stocking such a wide range of different products, how do we decide where, when and what to purchase?

Finally, contactless retail was once a great way to speed up our shopping, but the pandemic has turned this into something retailers and shoppers alike are using for reasons of hygiene. How have brands and retailers responded to this surge, and how are they innovating in their space? Our **Global Trends** report on [page 17](#) explores the explosion of contactless.

As we can see, the pandemic has impacted retail enormously, from the way we shop to the way we pay. In some cases, it has placed restrictions on shopping – such as enforced temporary closures – and in others it has accelerated existing trends. But life is also continuing in parallel, with traditional retail events such as back to school taking place.

Plenty to ponder, as ever. Enjoy the issue!

Phil Day

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STOREDITS

Back to School

As pupils return to their classrooms, how did retailers step up to the back to school challenge? Our report examines where lessons could be learned for the future.



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INDUSTRY REPORT

COVID-19

Shopping during and post lockdown were vastly different experiences to the norm. In our Industry Report, we take a deep dive into shoppers' attitudes and in-store experiences during these times.



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SHOPPER INVESTIGATION

Electronics

The electronics industry is huge. With such a wide range of retailers stocking a vast array of products, how do we choose where, when and how to shop? Our report asks: which retailers are the most switched on?



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GLOBAL TRENDS

Contactless Retail

Previously an added convenience to speed up shopping, contactless retail has now become almost universal for reasons of hygiene. We look at how retailers are responding to and innovating with this accelerated trend.



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STOREDITS



BACK TO SCHOOL

How did retailers step up to this year's back-to-school challenge?

Storedits [*stor-ditz*] is an analytical qualitative survey (or store audit) of a retail space carried out by POPAI.

Back to the classroom

While children across the UK have had their education disrupted by COVID-19, nonetheless this September has seen most pupils returning to physical lessons.

This is good news for retailers, as back to school is the third highest spending event in the UK (behind Christmas and Black Friday). Indeed, estimated spend in 2018 was £1.16bn, an increase of 36% over 2017.¹

Although stores offer a range of back to school items, perhaps unsurprisingly uniforms account for the greatest share of sales.



Education essentials

Of the 52 stores we visited, 15 had no back to school or related category promotions. These were Debenhams, Home Bargains, John Lewis, Lidl and Waitrose.

Unsurprisingly, the supermarkets offered the widest range of back to school products, including school uniforms, water bottles, stationery and rucksacks.

Most of the value retailers confined their promotional activity to stationery items.

Books and audio, calculators, hair accessories, shoe polish and sewing kits were also promoted under the back to school and stationery banners.

In the vast majority of retailers, the back to school promotions centred around the seasonal area or bays. In some cases, the seasonal aisles housed more than one campaign, with back to school competing with summer promotions in Asda, B&M, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Works and Wilko.

Meanwhile, smaller retailers like Ryman and Smiggle promoted stationery and back to school throughout the store

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STOREDITS

BACK TO SCHOOL



Back to school external and window display activity



Source: POPAI Storedits

A good reception?

Exterior and window displays promoting back to school were fairly scarce and not consistent across all stores within each chain.

Smiggle had by far the most impactful window display and was the only retailer we found using a digital window display.

The most popular types of 2D signage were gondola headers and fins or blades. In several cases, the latter were also used as category signage for products within the back to school portfolio.

The only digital signage we found in store was in Asda. Even so, this was not devoted solely to the back to school promotion.

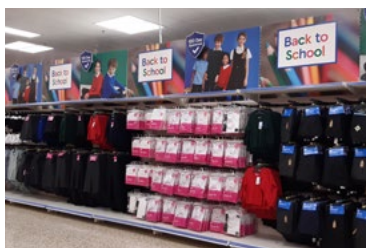
A small amount of 2D signage had imagery as well as text and these directly reflected the products promoted.

Sizing guidance was in short supply. In fact, the only retailers we found using signage to provide it were Marks & Spencer and Tesco. Sainsbury's used a header board directing shoppers to its website if they could not find the correct size in store.

Online education

All of the retail chains' websites had some form of back to school presence apart from John Lewis, Lidl and Home Bargains, reflecting their lack of in-store activity.

Product categories promoted online reflected those displayed in store, with stationery widely advertised. School uniform was at the forefront in supermarkets and department stores, as well as in Poundland, while food storage and drinking bottles featured highly in the value sector.



Back to school products promoted by retail channel

ALDI	✓	✓		✓	✓
ASDA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
b&m	✓	n/a	n/a	✓	✓
M&S		✓			✓
Morrisons		✓		✓	✓
Poundland				✓	
Ryman		n/a	n/a	✓	
Sainsbury's	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Smiggle		n/a	n/a		
TESCO					
RANGE		n/a	n/a	✓	✓
The Works		n/a	n/a	✓	
WHSmith	✓	n/a	n/a	✓	✓
wilko		n/a	n/a	✓	

Source: POPAI Storedits

KEY (for all infographics featured in this article)



Household,
e.g. food storage
& water bottles



School uniform



Sports
clothing



Stationery &
art supplies



Rucksacks & bags

Most retailers seemed to stick with tried-and-tested price promotions and promotional activity. For the most part, it was a good effort from the retailers we visited, with perhaps a little room for improvement here and there.

During the last two weeks in August, our researchers surveyed each store to identify how the back to school promotion was being communicated, including the types of P-O-P used, products being promoted and promotional techniques used by retailers.

We also explored these retailers' websites to understand how they were promoting back to school online.

Sources

¹ Mintel Press Office – August 2019

² The Drum – September 2019

Access our complete, comprehensive findings about back to school in retail.



Read the FULL REPORT

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LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FUTURE

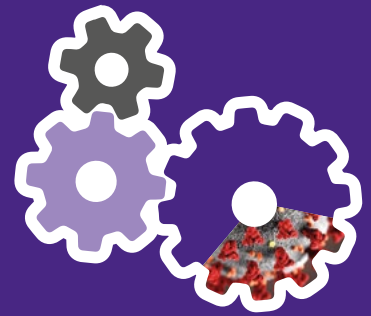


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INDUSTRY REPORT

COVID-19



In this report, we delve deeper into shoppers' attitudes to shopping and their experiences in both the lockdown environment and the post-lockdown era.

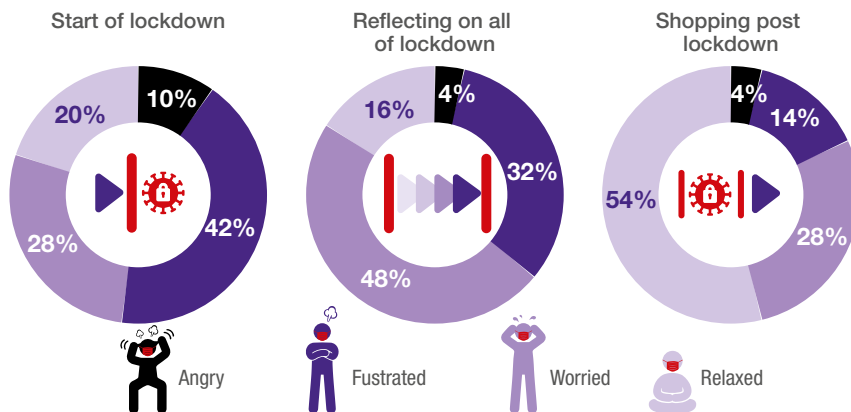
As COVID-19 spread across the globe, it swiftly became apparent that minimising social contact was a must.

Lockdown in the UK was announced by the Prime Minister in March. For a while, only essential shopping trips were permitted.

Lockdown emotions

Lockdown aroused a number of emotions in our shoppers. These included anger over empty shelves, lack of produce and inattention to social distancing by others, and frustration for the same reasons. Understandably, many shoppers were also worried, but reassuringly others felt relaxed that things would soon return to normal.

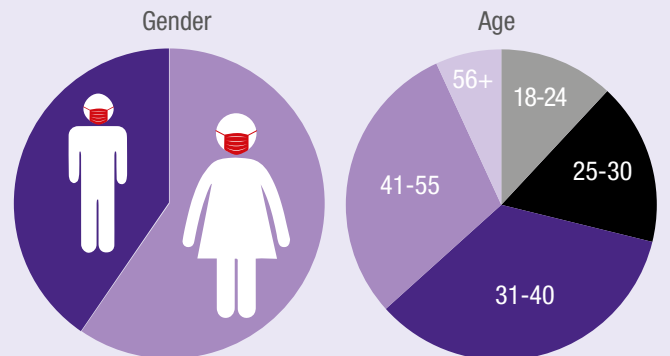
Attitudes towards shopping during and post lockdown



Source: POPAI/Roamlar

Our research

We asked 100 shoppers in March 2020 how they felt about shopping for essential products during lockdown, and a further 100 shoppers about their experiences shopping across all retail sectors, post lockdown in June 2020. *(Please note, this research was conducted before face coverings in shops became mandatory.)*



Shopper demographics | Source: POPAI/Roamlar

New habits

Most people had to adapt their shopping habits during lockdown. For some it meant fewer shopping trips but buying more, or making additional trips to stock up.

Prior to lockdown, the vast majority of respondents usually shopped at the big supermarket chains and discounters, but as a result of the pandemic and restrictions, many took to shopping for groceries at different retailers.

Online grocery shopping also found a new audience. While 47% of our shoppers said they did not usually use this channel, 12% had started to place home delivery orders to supplement their in-store shopping during lockdown.

Lasting change?

Just how permanent are these new habits?

Unlikely to change their shopping habits in the long term were 41% of shoppers, but 38% said that they would be likely to shop in-store less frequently. For 20%, the change they planned to stick to was shopping by themselves and not with other members of their household.

Once lockdown restrictions began to ease, our shoppers told us the most popular categories they shopped in the early post-lockdown weeks mirrored those which they had been buying online during lockdown.





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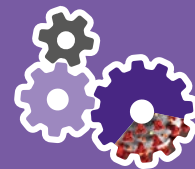
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INDUSTRY REPORT

COVID-19



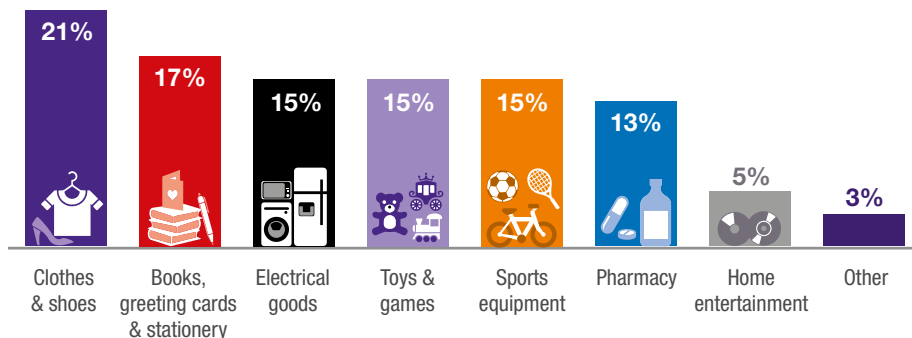
Staying safe

The safety measure which most reassured our shoppers was when there was a member of staff at the entrance to control the number of shoppers entering the store.

Staff cleansing trolleys and baskets, or at the least the provision of cleaning products for shoppers to do it themselves, was also a popular measure.



Product categories purchased online during lockdown



Source: POPAI/Roamler

Trying times

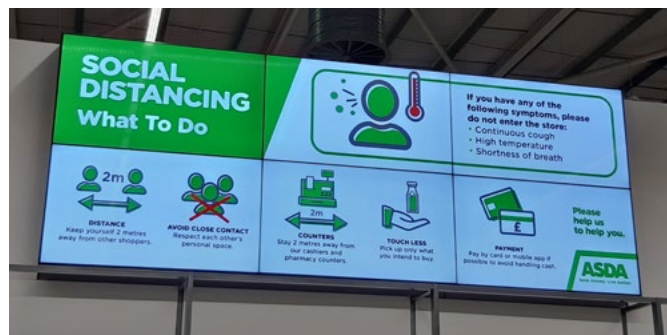
The days of try-before-you-buy seem to be on hold, as the norms of trying on clothes and jewellery and sampling and testing products have all been halted by the new restrictions.

Food sampling has also lost some of its appeal, even conducted within social distancing guidelines, with only 43% of our shoppers deeming it acceptable.

On queue

Queues have become another factor for shoppers to take into consideration, as shops limit numbers inside.

Most of our shoppers planned at least some of their shopping trips to avoid busy times and long queues.



Beyond lockdown

When asked about their best and worst shopping experiences post lockdown, most of our shoppers told us about their supermarket experiences. There was a lack of consistency within these retail chains, with all receiving both positive and negative feedback.

Lockdown brought some massive challenges for retailers and shoppers alike. Will we ever return to our old ways of shopping? Only time will tell.

Attitudes to using toilets in stores during the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: POPAI/Roamler



Access our full findings about shopper behaviour and attitudes during and post lockdown.



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SHOPPER INVESTIGATION

ELECTRONICS



Electronics play a huge part in our lives. Our report investigates: when it comes to electronics merchandising, which retailers are the most switched on?

The electronics category covers such a multitude of products it is no surprise that the UK electronics industry is extremely big business. Sales of consumer electronics, computing, peripherals and accessories were worth £8.65bn in 2019, a figure forecast to rise to £10.84bn by 2024.¹

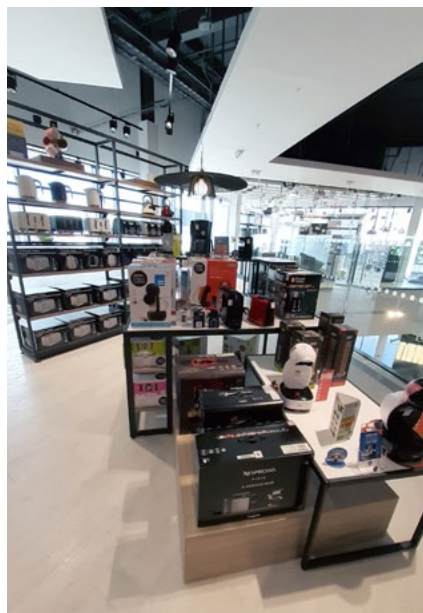
In terms of where we are buying, it seems we still favour a bricks-and-mortar store, with high street retail responsible for almost two-thirds of the market.¹

Shopper habits

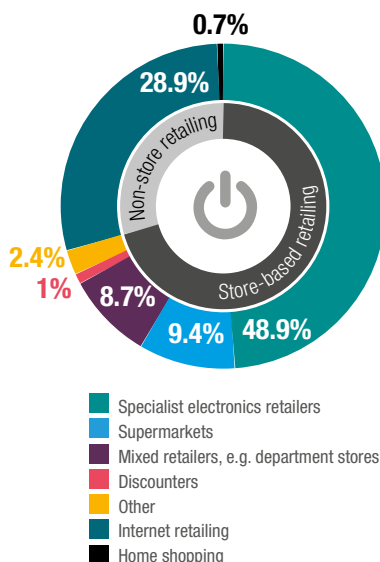
To find out more about their shopping habits, we asked our shoppers how often they usually shopped different electrical product categories.

Small kitchen appliances and health and beauty products, such as hair dryers, were the items they purchased most often. Conversely, floorcare (such as vacuum cleaners and steam cleaners) and photographic categories were the least frequently purchased.

Most preferred to use specialist electrical retailers for televisions and white goods, while more tended to shop online for audio, floorcare, computing, health and beauty and photography items.



Channel distribution for consumer electronics



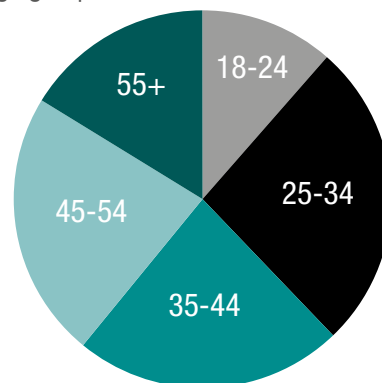
Source: Passport – Consumer Electronics – UK – July 2017



Our research

We asked 100 shoppers to visit a selection of the following stores: Asda, B&M, Currys PC World, Debenhams, Euronics, Home Bargains, House of Fraser, Jessops, John Lewis, Morrisons, Robert Dyas, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Range and Wilko.

UK consumer electronics users by age group



Source: Statista – Consumer Electronics – UK – 2020



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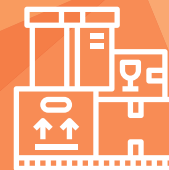
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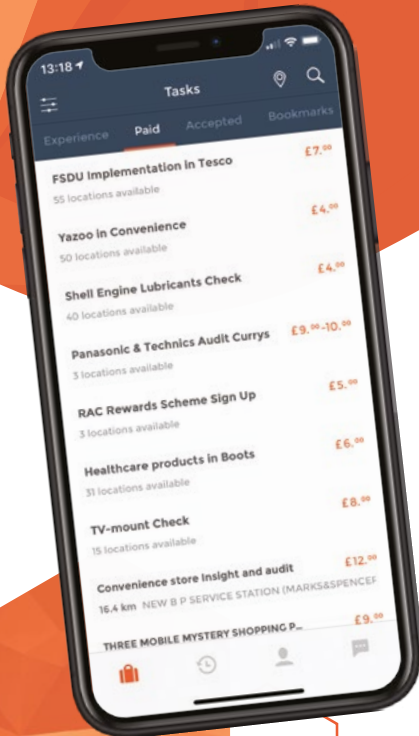
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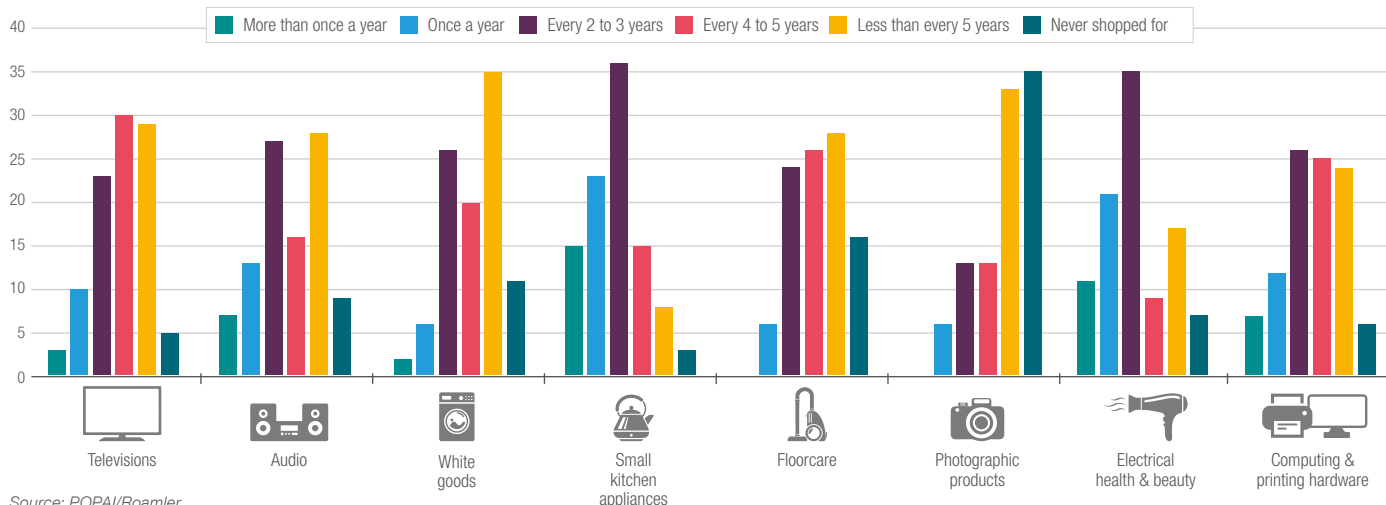
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SHOPPER INVESTIGATION ELECTRONICS



Frequency of electronics purchases



AT THE STORE

Small kitchen appliances were the items we saw most often on our store visits, featuring in 82% of the stores. We also found floorcare, health and beauty, audio and fans and heating in just over half.

We noticed very few window and external displays and advertising for electrical goods. Specialist stores including Currys PC World and Euronics tended to place more focus on external activity than other stores.

Top marks for signage went to Asda, Currys PC World and John Lewis, which were the only retailers to feature signage for electronics in all their stores. Conversely, Debenhams, House of Fraser and The Range had no signage.

Display dynamics

Our shoppers noticed a wide range of merchandising techniques, both across the different retail sectors and across the different electrical categories.

Electrical goods come in all shapes and sizes, which inevitably dictates the nature of merchandising and P-O-P, with mounted walls and tables used for larger items and gondola shelving generally used for smaller products.

Many shoppers like to find out more about the products while they are browsing. However, just 34% of our shoppers found any display materials with product information.

Lastly, we asked the million-dollar question: which of the displays stood out most to our shoppers, and why? As they had visited a wide range of retail chains, it was no surprise there was little consensus of opinion.



Apple was the most cited brand – and this was with just three mentions. It was followed by Google, LG and Sonos, with just two mentions apiece.

The electronics category is so broad that it was of little surprise to find varying opinions on display standout. But we did find a lack of focus from retailers, in particular in terms of window display and product information. However, many did tap into our love of tea and TV, with small electrical appliances and televisions mentioned as eye-catching categories.

Most preferred to use specialist electrical retailers for televisions and white goods, while more tended to shop online for audio, floorcare, computing, health and beauty and photography items. Although most supermarkets usually stock a relatively limited range of electrical goods, they were still the most popular choice for small kitchen appliances.

Price was the driving factor for shopping choices for every electrical category apart from televisions, where range was top priority.

Sources

¹ Statista – Consumer Electronics – United Kingdom – 2020

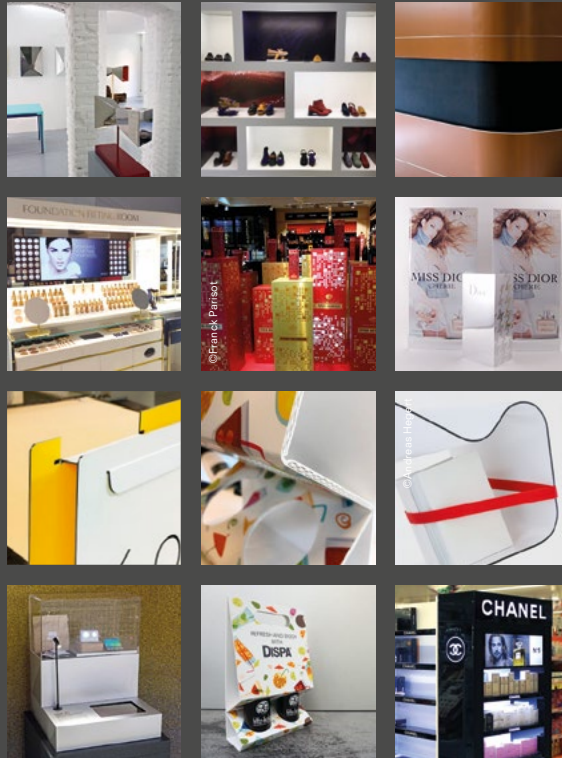
Access our complete findings about electronics.



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GLOBAL TRENDS

CONTACTLESS RETAIL



Overnight, the COVID-19 pandemic expanded the remit of contactless retail from seamless transactions for consumers yearning speed and convenience, into the ideal vehicle for hygiene-friendly commerce.



On the technology side, we have witnessed the expedited rollout of Amazon Go clones across the globe, new mobile apps that let in-store shoppers find out the information they need and pay on their phones, and wearables that help people to social distance. Meanwhile, acrylic screens have become a common design detail in physical retail.

Examples include Quick Eats, a tech-enhanced autonomous convenience store that operates in a similar way to Amazon Go, and sporting goods retailer Decathlon which is installing mobile self-checkout in its 81 stores in Germany.

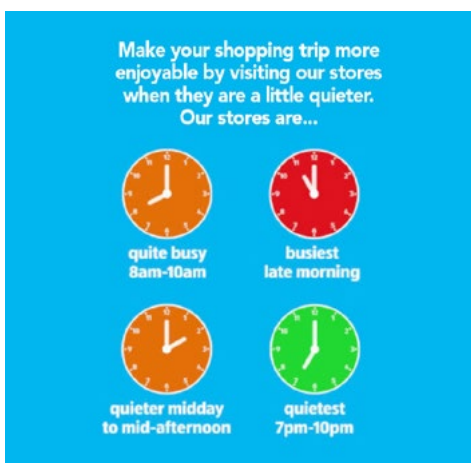


Meanwhile, Izu Shaboten Zoo in Shizuoka, Japan has implemented social distancing measures at its restaurant with the help of some soft toy capybaras.

The stuffed animals have been strategically placed on chairs that people are not allowed to use, helping diners to sit at a safe distance from one another during the COVID-19 pandemic, while also enjoying the company of a Capybara or two.

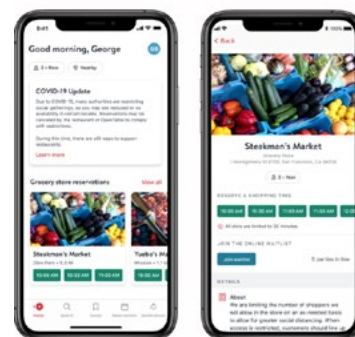
GLOBAL TRENDS

CONTACTLESS RETAIL



Italian women's fashion brand PINKO will unveil a new service for UK customers when its stores reopen which combines digital and physical shopping.

Consumers will be able to view garments worn by models online, live streamed from the boutique.



While it is difficult to predict consumers' long-term expectations around hygiene, it is safe to assume that these astute omnichannel strategies will stand the test of time.

Managing the flow

Aldi is rolling out a traffic light system across all UK stores to limit the number of customers inside at any one time, informing customers queuing outside when it is safe to enter by switching from a red to a green light.

Lidl in Ireland has launched a chatbot on WhatsApp that informs customers how busy its stores will be at their intended shopping time, while restaurant reservations platform OpenTable has applied its technology to supermarkets to allow shoppers to book specific time slots at their local grocery stores.



Access our full report about the rise of contactless retail.



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These case studies were featured in its quarterly trends publication, the Global Innovation Report, and on its digital platform. An in-depth report will be available to POPAI members soon.

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