

SHOPPING MALL



In Store

Retro Retail

Deja-New: Blending the Past With the Store of the Future

CH.1

It's 2004, and a new clothing store at the mall just opened yesterday. As you walk through the sliding glass doors, carefully placed merchandise and displays catch your eye with every glance. Music plays over the shop's speakers, interrupted only by a voice announcing the week's special offers. Taking a few more steps inside, you're greeted by a pop-up display showing the company's latest promotion: a chance to win backstage passes to see your favorite band. All you have to do is take a picture wearing something you purchased in the store. The virtual display even shows you standing next to the band's members in an outfit you had been looking at on the company's website yesterday. But how is any of that possible?

Because it's not really early 2004 — it's 2046, and the store of the future looks a lot like the store of the past, with some notable changes. The nostalgic experience of shopping in person has merged with new technology like the large screen in front of you. Powered by artificial intelligence and cameras that, combined with the retailer's app on your phone, knows you're standing in front of it, the AI display creates a version of you, but in a shirt and jeans that you haven't purchased yet. And since you filled out a questionnaire on the retailer's website several months ago about your favorite musical artists, the AI automatically renders digital versions of the band members alongside you — all in real time.

Pulling your attention away from the interactive display, you can see other people of various ages perusing the shelves and clothing racks, searching for the next gem in their respective wardrobes. Around the corner, a group of teenagers is live streaming their visit to the store, critiquing each article of clothing and accessory they come across. Whether capturing the feeling of nostalgia or resonating with novel desires, retailers of the future will be able to blend the physical, in-store shopping experience with technology that draws in every generation.

After browsing through another display, you find the outfit you've been looking for and head to the self-checkout kiosk. A prompt on the screen asks if you'd like to enter the contest you were shown earlier, and having already created a digital image of you wearing the shirt, it confirms your purchase and automatically enters you.



Retro Reimagined: Attracting the Next Generation With Vintage Cool

CH.2

Anemoia is defined as feeling nostalgia for a time or place that a person never experienced. As online shopping and smartphones have become ubiquitous over the past two decades, walking into a store, browsing its inventory, and seeing merchandise in a physical space is an experience that some younger consumers haven't always had. According to [Retail Dive](#), nearly three-quarters of Gen Z shop in person at least once a week, and the majority view it as an experience. Despite their digital upbringing, Gen Z favors physical stores for the immediacy, in-store discounts, and enjoyment they offer. Younger generations, like Gen Z and Gen Alpha, are also the first to have gained spending power at a time when shopping only requires a tap on a handheld screen from anywhere, anytime. But these generations are simultaneously the same ones that tend to value novelty experiences.

This has led many retailers to embrace brick and mortar in a way that complements online shopping. Without needing to solely rely on in-store sales, retailers can leverage their physical footprint in creative ways that bring together the tactile experience of being in a store with the convenience of digital shopping. For instance, smart shelves allow customers to physically hold an object in their hands and even see product specifications on a screen in front of them. Combined with opt-in features that allow the store to know a customer's preferences, the person may then be provided with a list of additional items related to the one they're holding.

The store of the future can go even further. Through customer insights, retailers can tailor in-person shopping to become an event in its own right. For example, a retailer may offer a limited-edition piece of memorabilia that becomes a collector's item — but only for those attending an event at a specific location. While events like this used to be common, e-commerce shifted how retailers garner customer attention, driving most shopping to websites and apps. Now, some retail segments, such as music, software, and games, that had shifted toward digital offerings have seen a renewed interest in physical products.





Retro video games, for instance, are now an entire subsector of the gaming industry, becoming so popular that companies are now producing new games in the style of ones from the 80s and 90s. They've even gone so far as to replicate the game consoles of those eras, with modern quality-of-life additions like improved batteries and screens to appeal to a new generation of video game enthusiasts. Even the aesthetic of retro gaming has come back, with kits that allow customers to assemble modern versions of classic arcade cabinets. Through a creative use of in-store space, stores can then set up demo units to reimagine the feeling of an old arcade, encouraging prospective customers to try out the item for themselves.

Products like this strike a chord with a range of generations, allowing older millennials and Gen X to recapture fond memories while giving younger generations the chance to experience an era of gaming they wouldn't have otherwise. Although it's impossible to tell what the world will look like in another 20 or 30 years, the desire for nostalgia has long been a consumer trend, and retailers will take steps to continue providing products and in-store offerings that capitalize on it.

Making Space: Personalizing Stores With Purpose

CH.3

The way retailers use physical space will also evolve in the coming years. Smaller store footprints in strategic locations will allow companies to enhance their agility and respond to contemporary trends in ways that traditional brick and mortar often struggled to in the past. Informed by technology and customer data that enables hyper-personalization, retailers will have unprecedented flexibility to adapt and change their stores in novel ways. Doing so can help them create an authentic look and feel to each location while [tailoring shopping experiences to different generations of customers](#). As trends and demographics shift, stores are then more easily able to shift with them, and combined with customer data that indicates when a shift is happening, retailers will be able to respond in near real time.

Greater agility in smaller stores also allows companies to shift layouts and products without the risk of overcommitting resources. Because of their size, these physical spaces require fewer employees to operate and less inventory to fill the space. They're also cheaper to build and maintain than larger storefronts, and with less square footage, they often incur cheaper overhead. Additionally, retailers can try new product offerings and features on a smaller scale without as much downside if the idea doesn't pan out. For example, a shoe retailer notices an uptick in online searches for "old school Converse" as younger shoppers seek to capture the 80s vibe. In response, the retailer rearranges store panels to spotlight their retro sneaker selection, pairing it with vintage marketing materials and in-store displays that make shoppers feel like they've stepped back in time. This approach not only appeals to nostalgia for older generations but also creates a novel, immersive experience for Gen Z and Gen Alpha—who crave authentic, memorable moments. If foot traffic doesn't increase like the retailer had expected, reverting the store's layout is a quick fix, with only a small inventory adjustment and handful of floor fixtures being moved.

No matter the circumstances a retailer finds itself in, one core principle will still apply: Retailers must know their customers. Data-driven analytics will remain an essential underpinning of how retailers operate, and even though stores will look different in tomorrow's world, designing and operating them will still rely upon strategic investment rooted in sound data.

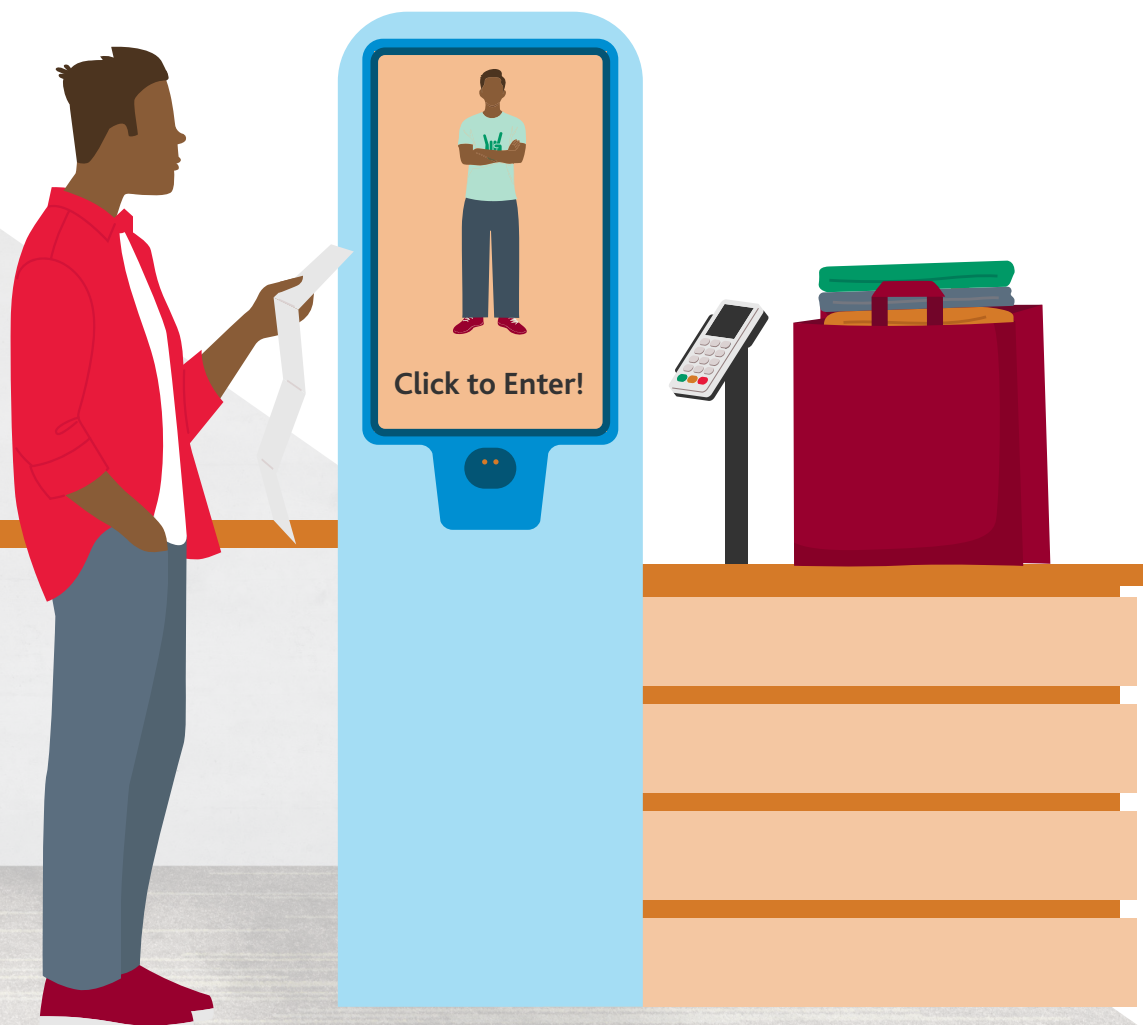


Retro Roots, Future Focus: BDO's Data-Driven Approach to Store Strategy

Retro isn't just a trend — it's a strategic opportunity. As retailers re-imagine physical spaces to tap into nostalgia and create immersive experiences, success hinges on more than aesthetics. It requires data-driven decisions that align store strategy with evolving consumer behavior.

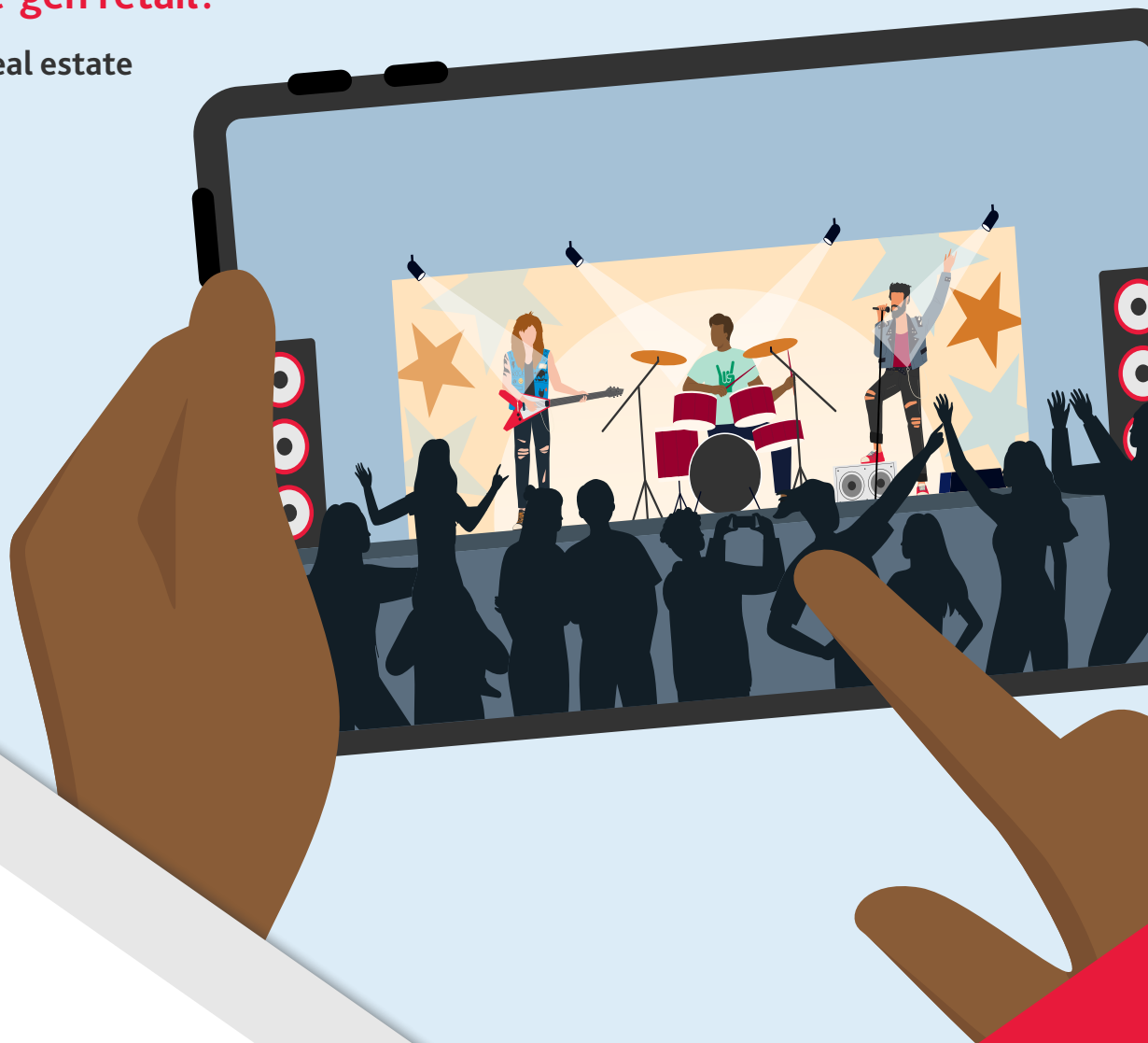
[BDO's Data Visualization Services](#) help retailers future proof their real estate footprint by leveraging the customer data they have at their fingertips to inform store-location and store-layout decisions. Powered by advanced analytics, our team combines location intelligence, customer behavior data, and external market insights to guide decisions on where to open, close, or reconfigure stores based on relevant trends, demographic shifts, and shifting customer expectations.

Whether you're scaling up, downsizing, or piloting new formats, BDO's analytics-first approach ensures your physical presence supports long-term business goals — and resonates with the next generation of shoppers.



Ready to level up from nostalgia to next-gen retail?

BDO can help align your business goals with your real estate strategy—no tokens required.



ABOUT BDO'S RETAIL & CONSUMER PRODUCTS PRACTICE

BDO has been a valued business advisor to retail and consumer products companies for more than 100 years. The firm works with a wide variety of clients across the traditional retail, consumer product and ecommerce sectors, ranging from multinational Fortune 500 corporations to emerging businesses, on myriad accounting, tax and advisory issues.

BDO USA, P.C.

Our purpose is helping people thrive, every day. Together, we are focused on delivering exceptional and sustainable outcomes and value for our people, our clients and our communities. BDO is proud to be an ESOP company, reflecting a culture that puts people first. BDO professionals provide assurance, tax and advisory services for a diverse range of clients across the U.S. and in over 160 countries through our global organization.

BDO is the brand name for the BDO network and for each of the BDO Member Firms. BDO USA, P.C., a Virginia professional corporation, is the U.S. member of BDO International Limited, a UK company limited by guarantee, and forms part of the international BDO network of independent member firms. For more information, please visit: www.bdo.com.

© 2025 BDO USA, P.C. All rights reserved.

