



# The Future of Apparel Retail:

**A 2023 Trend Report**



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# Welcome to the Future of Apparel **Retail** Tech: A Trend Report



It's been a bumpy ride for the apparel industry in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic created **many challenges** for the sector, including **store closures, inventory shortages, and global supply chain delays**.

When consumers returned to stores, though, they were eager to spend. In 2021, apparel stores saw more foot traffic than in 2019<sup>1</sup>. But that enthusiasm faded quickly. At the beginning of 2022, COVID variants slowed foot traffic. At the same time, growing inflation and a looming recession made consumers wary. In June 2022, inflation increased 9.1% year-over-year—the largest rise since the 1980s<sup>2</sup>.

Yet, despite the economic uncertainty, the industry is undergoing a profound transformation. Consumer choices around fashion are no longer just an expression of personal style. Instead, they reflect

our awareness of global issues, our embrace of innovation, and our commitment to shaping a more conscious future.

At Salesfloor, we understand the challenges facing the industry. Brands are navigating new consumer expectations, emerging technologies, and economic uncertainty. Creating a successful approach requires access to data, strategic planning, agility, and a commitment to innovation.

Salesfloor is the most scalable customer engagement solution on the market. With virtual shopping, clienteling, and AI-assisted selling platforms, our applications drive the highest online conversion rates, the biggest increases in average order value, and the best customer satisfaction rating. Our customers include some of the largest retailers worldwide—including Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Puma, Chico's, Allen Edmonds, and Saks Fifth Avenue.

In this report, we'll look at the most significant trends shaping the industry today. We'll also explore how apparel brands can drive the customer experience in 2023 and beyond.

# What to **Expect** from the Apparel Industry in 2023 and Beyond



Shifting consumer behaviors, growing social commerce, and a changing marketing landscape are creating a new retail paradigm

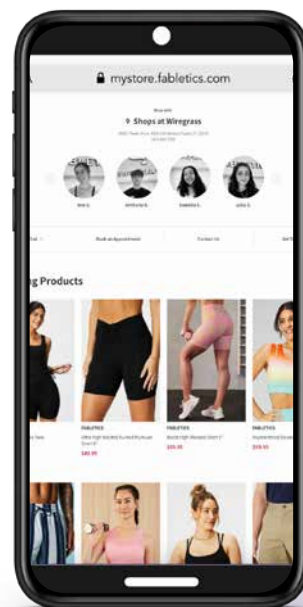
2023 has been a year of resilience and transformation. Despite the bleak economic outlook heading into the year, the apparel industry has remained steady. July retail sales were up 2% year-over-year<sup>3</sup>. According to forecasts, the segment will generate \$344 billion in revenue this year<sup>4</sup>.

But while apparel sales are increasing, how consumers spend is transforming the industry. Consumers are selective, choosing to invest in low-priced goods or luxury items. Retail foot traffic reflects this sentiment. In May 2023, visits to luxury, off-price, and secondhand stores were up 25.9%, 37.9%, and 33.5% compared to 2019<sup>5</sup>. (Visits to full-price apparel retailers were down 2% over the same period.)

While this bifurcation in the apparel industry is not new, the economic slowdown has accelerated it. At the same time, shifting consumer behaviors, the growing popularity of social commerce, and a changing marketing landscape are creating a new retail paradigm.

## Apparel Retail Visits Trending Upward Once Again

Monthly visits to Apparel, Luxury, Off-Price, and Secondhand Retail Compared to a January 2019 Baseline



# Trends in Apparel

Today, the retail maxim "the only constant is change" holds greater significance than ever in our digital-first era. Shifting consumer dynamics and unprecedented digital acceleration are forcing apparel brands to adopt a new playbook. Here are the eight most prominent trends in 2023 that are shaping the industry.

## 1 A New Framework For Direct-To-Consumer Apparel Brands

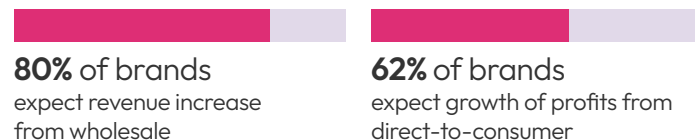
The late 2000s and 2010s saw the rapid growth of ecommerce and the rise of social media—resulting in an explosion of direct-to-consumer (DTC) brands. These companies launched online and leveraged social media to acquire customers.

After witnessing these digital success stories, traditional retailers also began to adopt the approach. In 2011, Nike started investing in its DTC channel—limiting the sale of merchandise on Amazon, Macy's, and Foot Locker. Ralph Lauren, Tommy Bahama, and Levi's were a few traditional retailers to also embrace DTC over the last decade.

### A Shifting Marketing Landscape

In 2021, Apple's iOS 14.5 privacy changes hampered customer acquisition. At a time when consumers were demanding hyper-personalization, these changes limited access to third-party data. At the same time, advertising costs across social media platforms skyrocketed, increasing by 75% in 2022<sup>7</sup>. And shifting consumer expectations—such as free and fast shipping—continue to squeeze margins.

### Glossy & Modern Retail Survey



As a result, brands can no longer rely on DTC as a business model. Companies are turning to other channels, like physical retail and wholesale, to generate growth. According to a survey by Glossy and Modern Retail, 80% of brands said they expect revenue from wholesale to increase in 2023<sup>8</sup>. Only 62% believe profits from their direct-to-consumer business will grow.

While DTC remains relevant, retailers are diversifying the way they connect with customers. "Pivoting to DTC does not result in better margins," says Simeon Segel—Managing Director at BMO Capital Markets—at Shoptalk 2023, "DTC is just a channel, and the product is always going to be more important than where you sell it."<sup>9</sup>



## 2 Off-Price Players Continue to Thrive

Today, consumers are more cost-conscious than ever. In an April 2023 survey, 80% of respondents reported buying lower-priced goods.<sup>10</sup>

The recent back-to-school shopping season illustrates this cautious attitude. Forty-six percent of parents reported shopping early, hoping to capitalize on Prime Day sales<sup>11</sup>. Parents also planned to spend 10% less this year—with supplies taking precedence over clothing and technology.<sup>12</sup>

As consumers tighten their wallets, off-price retailers are flourishing. In the first quarter of 2019, off-price stores captured 46.1% of visits, while traditional apparel brands drew 54.9%.<sup>13</sup> Today, the trend has reversed. In the first quarter of 2023, off-price stores received 53.8% of visits, while traditional apparel saw 46.2%.

As a result, off-price retailers are expanding. Ross Stores and TJ Maxx are on track to open 100 and 150 new locations this year. Burlington expects to open 70 to 80 new stores by the end of 2023.<sup>14</sup>



80%

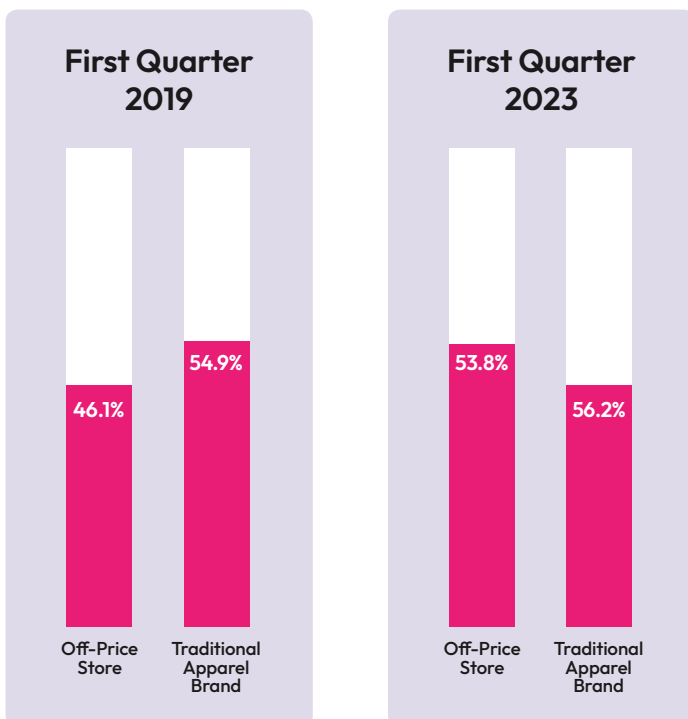
of consumers are buying lower priced goods

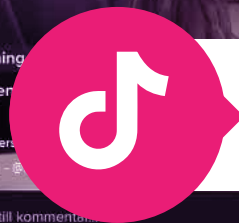
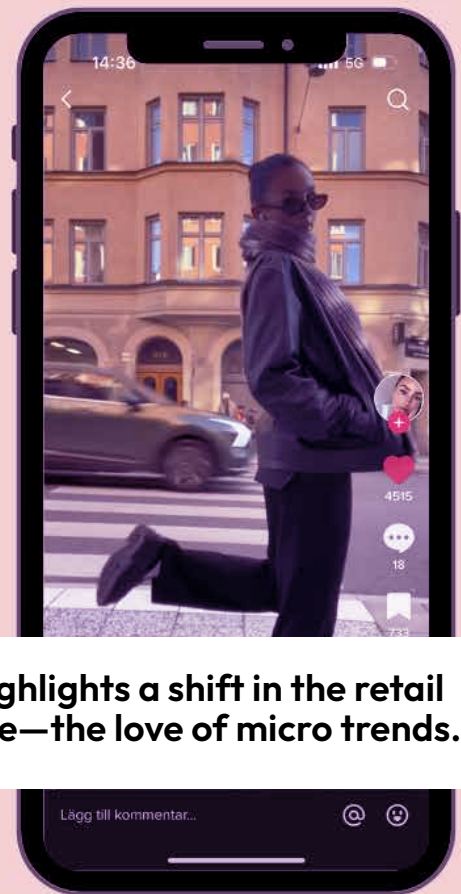
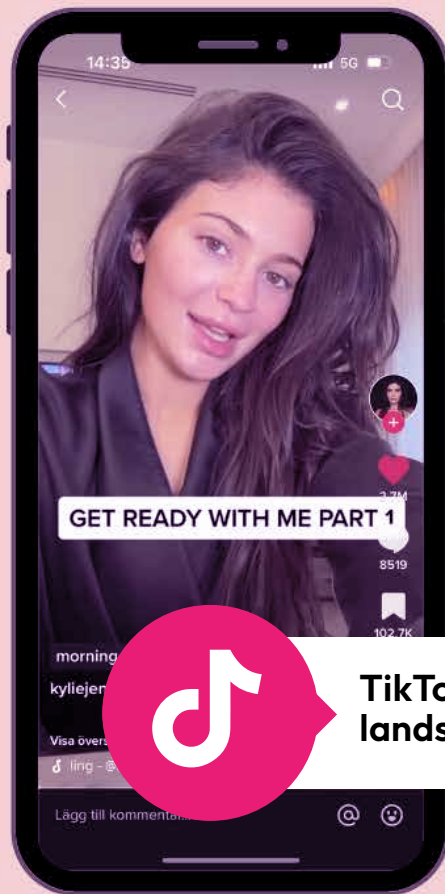
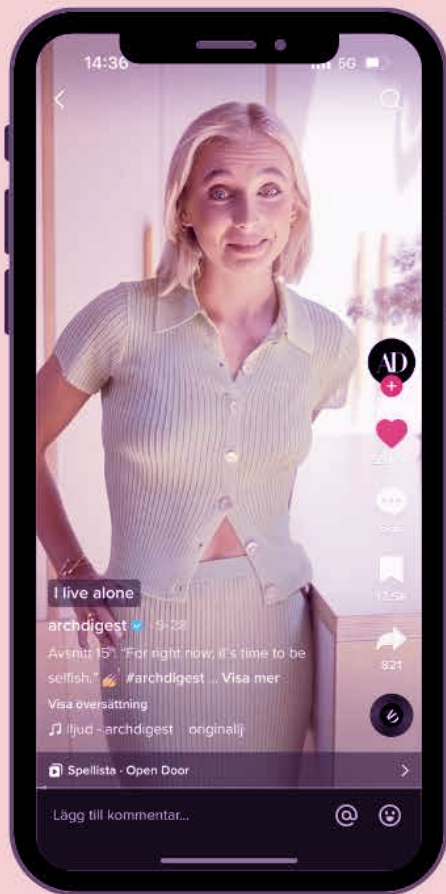
## 3 Embracing “Quiet Luxury”

When consumers spend their disposable income, luxury apparel players dominate. In 2023, the luxury market will generate over \$27 billion in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, luxury spending behaviors differ from those observed during The Great Recession. Instead of purchasing oversized bags adorned with logos, luxury shoppers invest in elevated basics—such as cinched-waist blazers, loafers, and outerwear. Consumers also avoid logos, not wanting to appear extravagant during economic uncertainty.

This trend, known as “quiet luxury,” gained popularity thanks to *Succession*, Gwyneth Paltrow’s ski collision trial, and Sofia Richie’s TikTok. According to Lyst, there have been over 172 million mentions of “quiet luxury” on the platform this year.<sup>16</sup>





**TikTok highlights a shift in the retail landscape—the love of micro trends.**

## 4 Micro Trends and Nostalgic Fashion

The rise of “quiet luxury” on TikTok highlights another shift in the retail landscape—the love of micro trends. From “balletcore” to “granola girl,” social media plays a significant role in popularizing fashion. While celebrities and entertainment used to dictate trends, online engagement and a desire for individualism now influence them.

“It used to be that there were particular looks that dominated, but right now, there’s something exciting happening,” says Rachel Tashjian—Fashion News Director at Harper’s Bazaar—in an interview with Business of Fashion.<sup>17</sup> “There are a ton of options, and there’s not one right thing or cool thing to wear.”

Many of these micro-trends highlight a fondness for nostalgia. Y2K-inspired outfits—which first appeared online in 2021—continue to be popular. At the beginning of 2023, rosette fashion ruled the red carpet and runways. Consumers also love Avril Lavigne’s 2000s grunge aesthetic. According to Circana, sales of women’s cargo pants jumped 81% from January to May.<sup>18</sup>

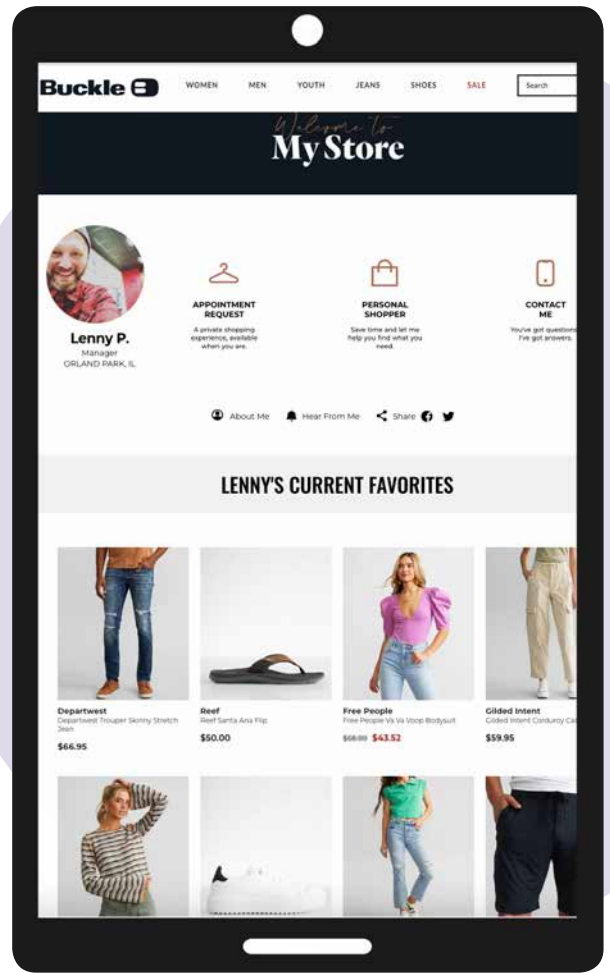
While the affinity for nostalgia is transitioning toward items from the 80s and 90s, the enthusiasm for past fashion trends shows no signs of slowing down.

## 5 Shopping as Entertainment

The line between shopping and entertainment is blurring—especially among younger generations. Today, most Gen-Z shoppers describe fashion as their favorite “entertainment category.”<sup>19</sup>

For younger consumers, browsing, selecting, and purchasing clothing has become synonymous with discovering new trends and engaging in online communities. Documenting your shopping experiences is a means of self-expression and integral to a sharable lifestyle.

The growing popularity of retail as entertainment, combined with consumer demands for a frictionless experience, is fueling social commerce. Although the channel generated over \$51 billion in sales in 2022, it is a relatively untapped market<sup>20</sup>. Sales generated on social media platforms are projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 29.2% from 2023 to 2030<sup>21</sup>. Apparel brands are outpacing this trend with a projected CAGR of 31.6%.



## 6 The Growth of Resale as a Channel

Over the past year, many consumers have prioritized economic concerns over sustainability. According to a recent poll, 81% of US shoppers struggle to shop sustainably while on a budget<sup>22</sup>. Only 35% of shoppers plan to buy from sustainable retailers, down from 50% in 2022.<sup>23</sup>

But even in a recession, consumers are still mindful of their environmental impact. They are also more wary of greenwashing than ever before. As a result, retailers are expanding their investment in resale as a channel.

In 2023, brands across price points have created secondhand marketplaces—including American Eagle, Faherty, Hanna Anderson, Kate Spade, J.Crew, Francescas, and Ulla Johnson. With resale as a channel, brands better meet sustainability goals, acquire new customers, and collect first-party data.







Uniqlo's 2023 Spring/Summer Collection<sup>25</sup>

## 7 The Rise of Everyday Wear

Today, consumers are navigating a new era of hybrid and remote work. As shoppers transition from the comfort wear of the pandemic, there is an emphasis on “wearability.” Consumers want clothing that seamlessly adapts to different circumstances. Arielle Siboni—Fashion Director at Bloomingdale’s—agrees. In a conversation with Business of Fashion, she notes that consumers are “seeking ways to appear polished while maintaining comfort.”<sup>24</sup>

Retailers are responding. Women’s workwear brand M.M.LaFleur introduced a “Power Casual” collection, blending “sophisticated pieces alongside more relaxed styles.” Uniqlo’s Spring/Summer 2023 collection was named “The Art of Everyday Life.” It featured “tones and patterns designed to uplift your mood.”



**"Consumers want clothing that seamlessly adapts to different circumstances."**

- Arielle Siboni

## 8 Performance Wear: The New Athleisure

Over the last 18 months, the athleisure market has cooled. In 2022, mentions of loungewear in marketing emails dropped 58% compared to the previous year<sup>26</sup>. And leggings sales in early 2023 were down by 24% compared to the same period.

But the athleisure market is far from extinct. Projections indicate that sales in the category will grow at a CAGR of 8.3% by 2030, exceeding \$660 billion<sup>27</sup>. Instead, the category is undergoing a shift. With the growth of wearability and a growing awareness of climate change, retailers are moving away from the yoga pants craze of the 2010s.

Today, brands are designing athleisure garments to withstand various elements. Sweat-wicking fabrics, cooling textiles, and sun-protective clothing have all become prominent in the sector. Some recent examples of performance wear include:

- **Columbia Sportswear** recently launched its Omni-Freeze Zero Ice Fabric that absorbs sweat and helps athletes regulate their temperatures.
- Brands like **Uniqlo** and **Chico** introduced sun-protective clothing earlier this year.
- **PT Golden Tekstil**—an Indonesian manufacturing plant that includes customers like Macy’s and Ralph Lauren Polo—increased “performance” fabric production by over 20%.<sup>28</sup>

### Athleisure Market over the last 18 months



Brands are designing athleisure garments to withstand various elements





# How to **Drive** the Customer Experience

Today, customers expect a personalized experience that moves seamlessly across channels. At the same time, they are less loyal, motivated by price and convenience. And yet they also look to brands to connect and find community.

For apparel brands, meeting those demands can feel challenging. Here's how companies can optimize the customer experience in 2023 and beyond.

## Rethink Digital Marketing

With customer acquisition challenges, brands are exploring new ways to drive product awareness and customer loyalty—creating a new framework for digital marketing.

## The Year of Collaboration

Collaboration has been the theme of 2023, and the synergy between fashion and entertainment has taken center stage. The release of Barbie showcased the potential impact of these partnerships. While retailers have not released the final results of these collaborations, Barbie-mania generated exceptional engagement among consumers. Brands across categories released Barbie-inspired collections—including **Forever 21**, **Boohoo**, **Fossil**, **Cotton On**, **Vans**, **Crocs**, **KITSCH**, **Ruggable**, **Xbox**, and more.



Some pieces from the *Barbie x Forever 21* collection<sup>29</sup>

©2023 Mattel



At the same time, retailers continue to see success with limited-edition collaborations. In February, Levi's and Stüssy's partnered to reimagine the iconic 501 Levi's jeans. Miu Miu and New Balance reunited to create another edition of the 574 sneakers. (The 2022 collection sold out within minutes.<sup>30</sup>) And this past Spring, Marc Jacobs, Deftones, and Stray Rats created a capsule collection—with Marc Jacobs even hosting a surprise Deftones concert in Williamsburg.<sup>31</sup>

This year, luxury retailers also invested more in travel partnerships. "The worlds of fashion and hospitality have always been intertwined, however now more than ever," says Robert Burke—founder and CEO of Robert Burke consultancy—in a conversation with Fashionista<sup>32</sup>. "Partnering with iconic hotels is a great way [for brands] to reach their customers wherever they may be."

This year, shoppers explored a limited-edition Dioriviera collection at the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles. Luxury designer Adriana Degreas created two limited-edition swimsuits for the Rosewood Le Guanahani Hotel in St. Barth. And the Four Seasons New Orleans partnered with a local designer—Ellen Macomber—to create a "Couture Costume Closet" for Mardi Gras.

The success of unconventional collaborations in 2023 will continue. For retailers, these partnerships

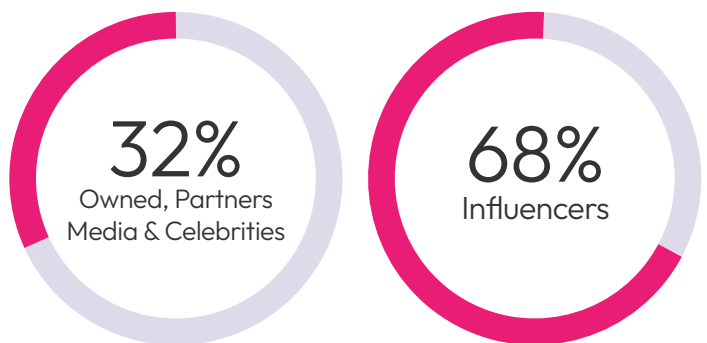
are an opportunity to connect with new customers and re-engage existing ones.

### The Power of Creator Partnerships

Creator partnerships have never been more valuable. A recent study by Matter Communications found that 81% of respondents<sup>33</sup> have researched or bought a product after seeing friends, relatives, or creators post about it.

While celebrity partnerships remain relevant, creator collaborations are driving the market. (Only 11% of customers prefer celebrity endorsements, down from 17%-22% in Matter Communication's 2020 study.<sup>34</sup>) By partnering with individual creators, brands boost awareness and build credibility.

### Influencers drive the majority of conversation about top brands on TikTok



Creator partnerships are fueling the influencer market, especially among luxury brands.<sup>35</sup>



Levi's  
+  
Stüssy

Marc Jacobs  
Deftones +  
Stray Rats



## The Potential for Fashion, Gaming, and Virtual Worlds

While retailers are still experimenting with the metaverse, virtual gaming worlds show immense potential for customer acquisition and engagement. A recent study by the Entertainment Software Association found that 66% of Americans play video games regularly<sup>36</sup>. These players range in age, background, and income levels. Forty-eight percent of players identify as female.

Today, gaming worlds—such as Fortnite, Minecraft, Animal Crossing, Roblox, and Zepeto—are avenues for community and self-expression. “The reality is, more and more people are living in these worlds,” says Phillip Henche, Director of Channel Innovation at Burberry, in a recent interview<sup>37</sup>. “The younger generations especially [do not] think about it as ‘my physical life’ and ‘my digital life.’ It’s all just the same.”

As Henche emphasizes, the creative potential for brands in gaming is limitless. In-game advertising, virtual storefronts, and digital fashion are still largely unexplored. And more than two-thirds of gamers say they would support more advertising within video games.<sup>38</sup>

However, consumers crave real-world relevance when engaging with brands in a virtual environment. Offline connection is critical. For example, when Ralph Lauren expanded its presence within Fortnite on August 3rd, it included a limited-edition physical version of the Polo x Fortnite P-Wing Boot<sup>39</sup>. The product sold out within minutes.

66%

of Americans play video games regularly





## Transform Your Approach to Destination Shopping

After a tumultuous past three years, physical retail is going through a reinvention. Brands across industries are experimenting with new formats and experiences to drive storytelling and power an effortless customer experience.

For apparel brands, an experience-centric approach is essential. By focusing on the customer's physical journey with a brand, companies encourage meaningful product interactions, build community, collect first-party data, and create seamless synergy between online and offline channels.

Here are a few ways brands have infused experience into their physical storefronts this year.



- **Neighborhood Goods**—a rotating department store—changes its product mix every Thursday. According to Matt Alexander—co-founder and CEO, the brand embodies the spirit of local retail<sup>41</sup>. The company tailors the products across its four stores to meet the needs of local communities.
- **Children's brands** can look to CAMP for inspiration. The retailer creates rotating themed experiences—including shows, special guests, and workshops to engage children in play. For example, CAMP partnered with ALLY to teach kids about financial literacy<sup>42</sup>. Visitors were able to run a toy store for the day.
- **Luxury brands** also continue to revamp their store experiences. Gucci is adding “private salons” across its portfolio with merchandise priced up to \$3 million. Tiffany & Co recently reopened its flagship in New York City, filled with artwork found in museums, an Audrey Hepburn experience, a roof deck, and a restaurant—called the Blue Box Cafe.



**Brands across industries are experimenting with new formats and experiences to drive storytelling and power an effortless customer experience.**





## Digitize the Customer Experience with AI

OpenAI's introduction of ChatGPT in November 2022 set off a wave of AI excitement. Throughout 2023, organizations across industries have explored the potential of generative AI.

For apparel, AI applications represent an opportunity to reinvent the customer experience and optimize operations. McKinsey estimates that generative AI could increase operating profits in the apparel, fashion, and luxury sectors by \$275 billion.<sup>44</sup>

### Here's a look at how AI is transforming the retail customer experience.



**Trend forecasting:** AI applications analyze consumer purchases, social media, and runway shows to predict upcoming fashion trends.



**Demand prediction:** AI algorithms assess historical data, trends, weather, and other external factors to help retailers optimize inventory levels.



**Size and fit recommendations:** AI-powered applications use consumer purchasing history and measurements to suggest accurate size recommendations.



**Personalized recommendation:** AI platforms use customer data, text inputs, or customer-provided images to deliver more personalized product recommendations—driving average order value.



**Consumer insights:** AI tools analyze customer feedback, review, and sentiment on social media. This can help brands better understand customer satisfaction and areas for improvement.



**Store operations:** AI applications track customer movement around the store—supporting merchandising and replenishment planning. Retailers also use AI insights for staff scheduling. At the same time, these tools provide real-time visibility into store performance, sales trends, and customer behavior.



**Customer service:** Chatbots or virtual assistants can handle routine customer inquiries, freeing store staff to focus on more complex customer interactions.



**Customer relationship management:** AI-powered applications support sales associates by providing real-time recommendations based on customer data. They can also detect customer sentiment and guide associates on how to respond.

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**“Salesfloor is the solution we’ve been looking for. It empowers our associates to serve customers online and in-store. We’ve seen fantastic results and are excited to continue to see the benefit of delivering a true omnichannel experience for our customers, using Salesfloor.”**

- Kay Moini, Vice President of Retail  
Peruvian Connection

## A Look Ahead at the **Future**

While 2023 has brought many changes, one thing is clear: apparel brands can no longer rely on name recognition and customer loyalty to fuel growth. Instead, companies must invest in diversification—including where they sell and how they market to customers—while remaining authentic to their values.

To remain competitive in 2023 and beyond, apparel brands must invest in the right tools—including those that provide precision data and analysis, empower employees, and foster genuine human connection with customers. Adaptability will be essential as brands continue to navigate the intersection of design, technology, consumers’ values, and customer expectations.

## About **Salesfloor**

Salesfloor is a customer engagement platform designed with enterprise apparel brands in mind. It is the only platform on the market that unifies virtual shopping, clienteling, and AI assisted selling — driving sales and Total Experience with proven ROI. Salesfloor’s mission is to revolutionize the retail sales and service experience by fusing the human connection with the power of AI. At Salesfloor, we recognize the new challenges apparel brands face with a growing demand for an omnichannel world. Our signature offering is in providing retailers the tools and the training to connect with customers for better service and increased conversion and retention rates. We believe that value is an exchange: give value, grow value. Our unique digital tools are central to cultivating loyal and satisfied customer segments, ones that will remain resilient to the strong and ever-shifting currents of ecommerce.

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