

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light blue surgical face mask and a blue and white vertically striped button-down shirt, is holding a smartphone in her right hand and several white shopping bags in her left. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a solid yellow color with a diagonal line running from the top left to the bottom right.

# Reinventing the Store Experience

---

A guide for reopening your retail locations in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic

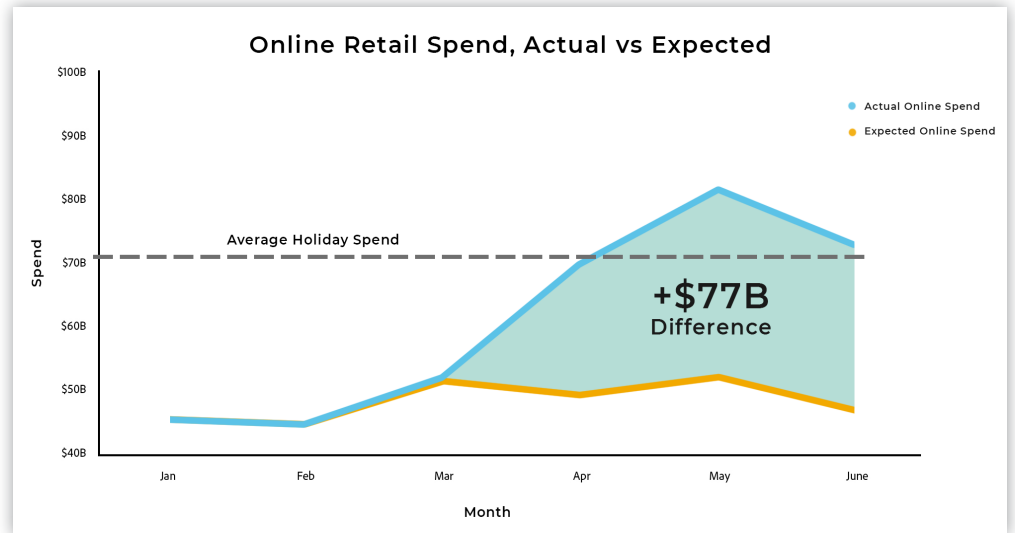


## 2020's eCommerce Boom

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on all facets of daily life. Of course, that includes the way we shop.

In order to mitigate risk, more consumers are shopping online. As a result, there's been a notable, well-reported boost in eCommerce sales as a whole. **According to the Adobe Digital Economy Index**, \$73.2 billion was spent

online during the month of June 2020. That's a 76.2% increase from the same period last year. What's more, online spending from March to June 2020 was \$77 billion more than expected.



### BUT the store - in general - is still alive and kicking

This eCommerce growth doesn't mean brick-and-mortar retail is dying. In fact, a closer look at the numbers tells us a very different story. According to [Digital Commerce 360](#), in 2019, eCommerce made up just 16% of total retail sales. That means the remaining **84% of sales happened within the four walls of a physical store** location. While the Covid pandemic has clearly accelerated this industry-wide shift online, predicting the death of the store seems more than a little premature.



## Why is the store still so popular?

Sure, online shopping is convenient. But the majority of consumers still prefer in-store shopping. There are myriad reasons for this preference, but a few are especially common. **According to a survey from Valassis**, 70% of shoppers choose to shop in a physical store because they want to see or touch an item prior to purchase. And 66% want to be able to take the item home immediately, rather than waiting for an online order to ship. Clearly, shoppers still value brick-and-mortar retail, and they will continue to do so.

## The store experience needs to evolve

Many consumers are eager to get back to stores. But for many, their preferences and expectations have changed a lot in the last six months. Retailers must adapt accordingly.

In fact, the most successful retailers will be those that see this as an opportunity to reinvent the store experience. How do you do that? By developing innovative ways to deliver great in-store engagements, while effectively addressing health and safety concerns.

## Top 5 Reasons Consumers Shop In Store



Want to see or touch an item prior to purchase

Want to take home the item right away



Want to take advantage of in-store coupons and offers

For a pleasant shopping experience



Ability to talk to a salesperson



## Build trust pre-store visit

The key is creating trust before customers even set foot in your stores. They need to be completely comfortable with the idea of visiting one of your locations. You need to convince them that you've put sufficient measures in place to create a safe environment.

So promoting all the actions you're taking in your marketing outreach and wherever else you can communicate this message is critically important. In fact, trust between you and your customers is critical. For that reason, new store openings need to focus - and be measured - on safety, PPE, signage, comfort level, cleanliness, and other actions designed to drive people back to stores.

 A BULLSEYE VIEW



### Staying Safe on Your Target Run: What You Need To Know

July 29, 2020 - Article reads in 2 minutes

GUEST EXPERIENCE



*Team members at our Sawgrass store in Sunrise, FL, pictured above, put a custom spin on their masks.*

## Creating a great post-COVID store experience

Reimagining the store experience can seem overwhelming. That's why we developed this guide. Throughout the following pages, we'll walk you through nine key considerations to make when planning how to evolve your store operations. After reading this guide, you'll be well on your way to delivering great in-store shopping experiences in a post-COVID world.



KEY CONSIDERATION 1:

# Geographical Differences

The effects of the pandemic vary widely based on geographical location. While some areas of the country have been hit hard, others have had a relatively low number of infections. Of course, this is constantly shifting.



At the same time, regulations developed to combat the pandemic vary. For example, the majority of states have issued statewide mask mandates but not all require them. To further complicate things, there are also city and county-wide mask mandates in states without one.

## Flexibility is key

Because of these geographical differences, there's no "one size fits all" plan for reopening your brick-and-mortar stores. This is especially true if you operate stores in different regions of the country.

Some processes -- such as social distancing floor markers -- will work across all locations. But others will need to be adapted depending on the location. And because the pandemic is a fluid situation, all processes and procedures must be monitored to ensure they continue to meet the needs of a specific community.

## Establish effective communication processes

An open, honest communication loop between your corporate office and your store managers is critical to success. Be sure to provide your store staff with the tools they need to effectively communicate with your corporate office. That way, they'll be well equipped to provide feedback on how processes are (and aren't) working. Then, you can better understand what changes are necessary -- and effectively communicate these changes as they happen.

## KEY CONSIDERATION 2:

# In-Store Staff Interaction with Shoppers

Many retailers train in-store staff to greet visitors immediately and provide hands on assistance throughout the shopping experience. In the past, your shoppers probably appreciated this level of service. In fact, the same Valassis survey we mentioned earlier found that being able to interact with a sales associate is a top reason consumers opt to shop in a store. And PwC - in the context of growing technology influence - found that 82% of US consumers want more human interaction in the future.



## Consider individual preferences

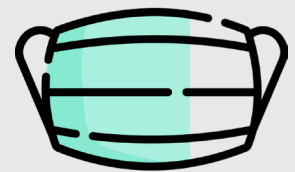
But today, your shoppers might not be comfortable with close contact. So how do you continue to provide the same level of service while respecting social distancing requirements and preferences? Your store associates must adapt the ways they interact with shoppers -- at least for the short term.

For example, if you're a clothing retailer, you may want to start offering personal shopping appointments to your customers. That way, they can work 1:1 with an associate, away from other shoppers, while practicing social distancing.

## Empower your staff

Of course, all shoppers (and sales associates) are different. It will be key for your associates to "read the room" to determine what level of interaction a shopper is comfortable with. In addition, it's important to provide your customers with ways to give their feedback about interactions with store associates. You can then leverage this feedback to coach associates and make store-wide changes.

Being able to interact with an associate is a top reason consumers opt to shop in-store.



**64%**

of consumers say associates being required to wear masks makes them more comfortable to shop in store

\*PowerReviews Holiday Survey 2020



KEY CONSIDERATION 3:

# In-Store Checkout

Once a shopper has found a product that fits their needs, it's time to pay. But the checkout process will probably look different than it did pre-COVID.

Of course, your shoppers will still expect friendly, helpful associates at the checkout. But they'll also likely expect there to be minimal physical contact -- both from the store associate ringing them up and their fellow shoppers.

Typical checkout features include plexiglass barriers and social distancing floor signs that encourage shoppers to stay six feet away from each other. And because there's risk involved with handling cash and touching payment screens, you may also consider investing in technology that'll allow for contactless payment. This is something that has been commonplace in Europe for a while and is now becoming more of a staple in the US.

## Pandemic has accelerated innovation

The pandemic has forced retailers to become increasingly innovative in their approach. Walmart, for example, experimented with **an exclusively self-checkout store**. While this has made social distancing easier and the the whole process quicker and more efficient, has reduced human contact negatively affected customer experience?

With this in mind, customer feedback is a key mechanism you should be looking to leverage in order to deliver experiences that hit the mark. Be sure to actively solicit feedback from your shoppers to identify ways to improve the checkout process.



45%

of consumers say contactless payment capabilities make them more comfortable to shop in store



56%

of consumers say restricting customer numbers makes them more comfortable to shop in store

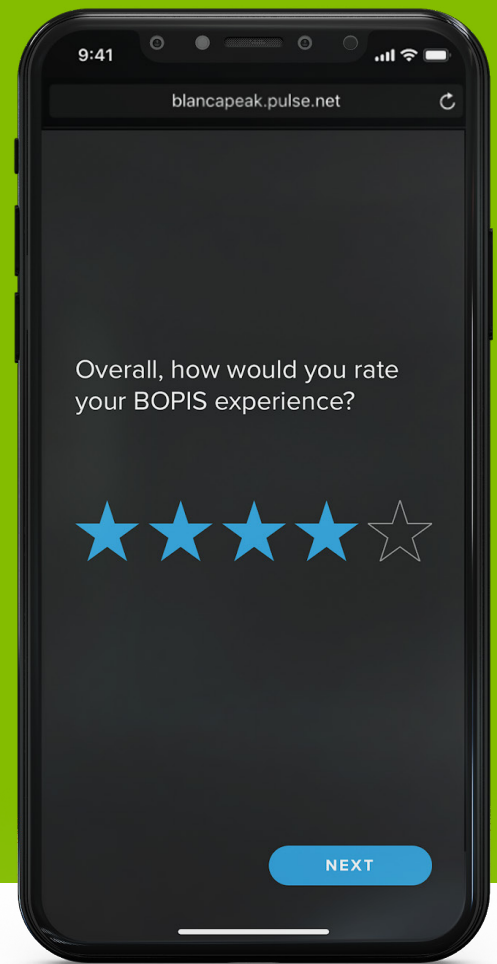
\*PowerReviews Holiday Survey 2020

## KEY CONSIDERATION 4:

# BOPIS

You might have shoppers who don't feel comfortable spending time in a brick-and-mortar store, but they don't want to wait for an online order to ship to their homes. Offering a buy online, pick up in store (BOPIS) option can help you effectively serve those customers.

BOPIS has gained momentum in the midst of the pandemic. The same Adobe report we cited earlier found that in June 2020, BOPIS orders were up 130% year-over-year. This trend is likely to continue.



If you're not already, now is the time to start offering BOPIS. Failing to do so means you'll lose shoppers to retailers that do offer this service.

## Optimize BOPIS processes...or get left behind

When you're developing your BOPIS experience, consider what the entire process will look like, from start to finish. You'll also need to consider how to keep person-to-person contact to a minimum.

If you already offer BOPIS, consider whether your existing processes are robust enough to handle an increase in demand. If not, identify areas of improvement. And of course, continuously look for ways to optimize the entire BOPIS experience. A great way to identify areas to improve is to actively solicit feedback from your BOPIS shoppers.

## Make it seamless

Remember: BOPIS may be a new experience for your shoppers. Make sure the entire process is easy and seamless and provides shoppers with a great experience that positively impacts how they feel about your brand. After all, the stakes are high; a survey from PwC found that one in three consumers will walk away from a brand they love after a single bad experience.

**In June, BOPIS orders were up 130% year-over-year.**



## KEY CONSIDERATION 5:

# Curbside Pickup

Traditionally, BOPIS involved a shopper making a purchase online, and then going into a store to pick it up. But at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, more retailers started offering curbside pickup. And it's quickly become a popular option for shoppers looking for a quick, convenient way to get what they need while avoiding risk.



After all, “drive-thru” is an established part of shopping in some industries - such as fast food, banking and so on (incidentally, **McDonald's took a whopping 90% of sales via its drive-thru service** in the first few months of the pandemic).

But why should more traditional retail be any different? Especially in instances where one-to-one interaction isn't so integral to the overall experience.

## Curbside pickup becoming critical to success

If you're not already, it's a good time to add a curbside option to your BOPIS offering. Be sure you have both the staff and technology in place to provide great curbside service with short wait times and minimal person-to-person contact.

In an ideal world, your customer will pull up and your associate will be waiting with the item ready to drop in their vehicle. But this process relies on a number of components being executed with precision.

So make sure you are able to accurately measure your ability to deliver this service effectively (i.e. order fulfillment, customer wait times, customer satisfaction, friction of the experience etc.).



**55% of consumers say they will make more holiday purchases this year via a BOPIS method (e.g. curbside pick up) compared to last year**

# Store Layout

In the age of COVID-19, many of your shoppers will opt for BOPIS or curbside pickup, when it's available. But there are still plenty of customers who will choose to come into your stores to shop. And they're likely to have heightened expectations for health and safety.



## What you should do

For starters, establish a regular cleaning and sanitizing schedule. Depending on local regulations, you might also want to require masks. Many shoppers will also expect an environment that allows for social distancing. You may want to consider limiting the number of customers that can be in your store at any given time. Also, adding markers to the floor, especially in checkout lanes, to remind shoppers to stay six feet away from each other can be effective.

**Target implemented a “dual-store entrance” in one of its Texas locations.** This enables consumers to more efficiently gain access to the items they want while coming into contact with fewer people than they previously would have.

## Returns process

Also think about returns. This is a key driver for many store visits as channels increasingly blur. Making this process as quick and hassle free will certainly endear you to your customers. A drop-off box could potentially be extremely effective, although the obvious flip side of this is that it is unlikely to drive additional purchases.

## Guide your customers

Remember: this is a new shopping experience for your customers. Be sure to post signage and make regular, friendly announcements to remind shoppers of your new social distancing and safety protocols. And be sure to ask for feedback from your shoppers so you can improve your store layout appropriately.



63% of consumers say frequent sterilization of stores makes them more comfortable to shop in-store



# Continue to focus on CX

It's no longer enough to sell great products. Why? Because increasingly, experiences are driving purchase behavior. The same [PwC survey](#) we mentioned earlier found that 73% of consumers say experiences are an important factor in their purchase decisions.



When shoppers have great experiences with a brand, they're more likely to make a purchase. What's more, they're more likely to tell their friends and family about their great experiences. So the pressure is on...now more than ever.

## Get it right now, then reap the rewards

Delivering engaging in-store experiences during a pandemic can definitely be a challenge. But it's certainly not impossible. And those who create rewarding interactions now will be paid back in kind once restrictions are lifted and normality returns (as much is this possible). Great brands will think outside of the box to deliver great in-store experiences throughout the purchase journey that help foster loyalty.

## Iterate, measure, improve

You'll likely find some of your efforts resonate, while others fall flat. And that's OK. The important thing is to actively seek out feedback from your shoppers, and then adjust plans accordingly.

Flexibility - in particular - is key. This is a rapidly changing environment with new information becoming available quickly that changes common thinking. **As the NRF asserts:** "As retailers slowly reopen across the country, the single most critical thing to remember about post-COVID-19 retail design is this: Stay flexible."



**73% of consumers say experiences are an important factor in their purchase decisions**

## KEY CONSIDERATION 8:

# Understand the impact of changes

By now, you've probably noticed a recurring theme in this guide: the importance of customer feedback. Soliciting feedback from your customers -- and then acting on it -- has always been important. But it's even more critical today as you're reopening your store locations post-COVID.



## Gain insight on all COVID-influenced changes

Whatever feedback mechanism you leverage, you need to gain insight on all the different types of experiences your shoppers will now have with you -- from interacting with associates in the store and the checkout process to BOPIS and curbside pickup. The feedback you receive from shoppers will help you identify where to adjust your plans and protocols.

Asking for specific feedback about the different elements of your new store experience demonstrates an authentic desire to understand how they value the measures you take. This shows shoppers you care about their experiences, even in a new world where physical contact is limited.

You also need to incorporate a mechanism that factors geographic differences into the findings you collect. Your customers will likely have different opinions based on where they are located, so ensure your feedback program is representative enough while focusing on capturing the quality information you need to account for this variation.

## Understand customer emotion

As part of your feedback program, you'll need to incorporate a way to understand how your customers feel about the experiences you offer. Why? Because the emotional connection a shopper feels towards your brand massively impacts their behavior. **According to a report from Motista**, shoppers who feel emotionally connected to a brand spend up to two times more than those who don't.

## Critical non-buyer insight

Retailers have established feedback mechanisms for capturing feedback from customers who buy products. They have their information on file and can reference a specific purchase when requesting this insight.

But what about non-buyers? Understanding why someone would interact with your brand and then decide not to purchase is arguably far more important to driving meaningful improvement.

However, gaining feedback from this group has traditionally been a huge challenge. How can you ask consumers about their experiences with you when you have no record of who they even are?

## Think who will provide the best insights

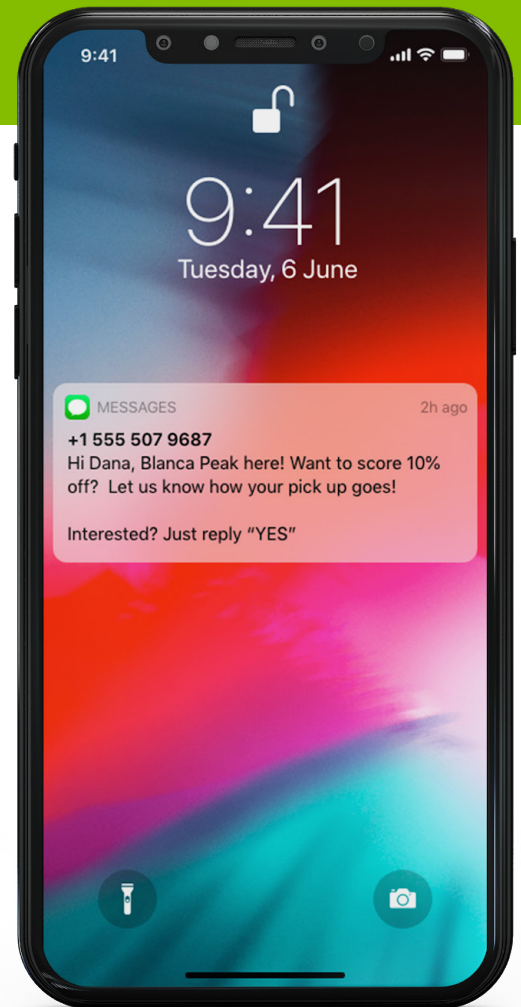
In order to get the most effective and actionable intelligence, you need to think about the people who will provide the most considered and meaningful insights - and adjust your strategy accordingly.

In any environment - but in particularly this one - the best way to capture this feedback is to tap into your existing customer base. These are the people who know your brand best.

They will have clear expectations about how you should respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic. They are also likely to be invested in your business enough to dedicate the time necessary to provide you with the information you need to drive impactful improvements.

## Consider incorporating employee feedback

A best-practice store feedback program should mesh customer and employee feedback. Your on-the-ground staff offer a valuable perspective (i.e. Are they having difficulty enforcing COVID-related rules? Does their day-to-day work make complying with employee guidelines difficult? etc.)





## KEY CONSIDERATION 9:

# Communicate Changes with Your Customers

You absolutely should be making the changes in your store network your customers want to see. But - once you've implemented these - you need to make sure they know about it. Why? You need to get them completely comfortable with the idea of shopping in one of your stores. Communication is key.



You should have the data you need to segment your customers according to location. So consider email campaigns highlighting localized changes and stories (e.g. a specific store associates take on safety in their place of work).

## Incorporate mobile

While there has been a collective focus on minimizing face-to-face contact, technology's influence on our daily lives has accelerated during the pandemic period. Why wouldn't you leverage the existing technology infrastructure you have at your disposal for this purpose?

Your mobile app - in particular - most likely incorporates geo-location data to target push notifications and other messages to your employees. So use it to educate customers about everything you've done to make their local store safer. Make sure you incorporate specific actions taken as a result of customer feedback. Some innovative retailers even allow for check-out through their apps, which further reduces physical contact.

Perhaps most crucially of all, ensure you enable them to provide feedback about visits to your stores on mobile. This is when this information will be freshest in their mind and therefore will be especially accurate.



## Conclusion

There's no doubt the COVID-19 pandemic has sped up eCommerce growth. But even now, the vast majority of retail sales still happen within physical stores. That won't change anytime soon, as shoppers still see tremendous value in brick-and-mortar retail.

Shoppers will return to stores, but they'll have heightened expectations. Retailers must adapt quickly to meet these expectations -- or risk losing shoppers to a competitor that does.

By working through the considerations in this guide and actively soliciting feedback from your shoppers about all the interactions they have with your company, you're well on your way to delivering engaging in-store experiences in a post-COVID world.



# Mystery Shopping Reinvented

With so much uncertainty in the COVID era, second guessing what your customers are thinking right now is completely impossible. And nowhere is this more the case than your store network. So how can you meet and exceed their expectations?



PowerReviews Store Experience Feedback is mystery shopping reinvented. A highly innovative and unique solution that facilitates extremely deep, meaningful and context-rich feedback, it enables you to invite existing customers on in-store “missions” to measure their experience. Provide them with specific instructions, incentivize them with discounts and then collect the feedback on their interactions with you.

## Mesh feedback with loyalty

Because you are capturing insight from the people who 1) know your brand best and 2) are invested in your success, you gain a deep understanding of the key drivers of loyalty at scale - incredibly insightful and actionable information that drives transformational improvements.

Simultaneously, you also drive these people to your store (when they otherwise may not have visited), leading to increased sales. In fact, 50% of customers who complete one of our store “missions” also make a purchase, even though it’s not required.

“Mystery shopping has always been an important way for us to measure operational performance; however, the traditional model has a number of frustrating limitations. PowerReviews Store Experience addresses all of these limitations in a really innovative way. With PowerReviews Store Experience, we get more holistic insights at a scale that was never possible before.”

**KYLE BROWN**  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, HONEYGROW



## Mobile and real-time

PowerReviews Store Experience Feedback is a mobile-first solution. This means customers are intended to provide their feedback while in the store or immediately after their visit when it's fresh of mind.

Our technology then routes this feedback in real-time to wherever it needs to go - which means you facilitate immediate response and action.

In the Covid era, this real-time element is especially critical. For example, quickly find out about and rectify associates not wearing masks, customer mask wearing not being appropriately enforced, poor store hygiene or any other issue that is affecting customer experience.

[Learn More](#)



[Request a Demo](#)



[Email Us](#)



*We've used [PowerReviews] to create a tailored mission that will help ensure we're measuring the behaviors that we've worked hard to train our team on. Sur La Table has high standards for how we treat our guests, and this program gives us visibility into our effectiveness and lets us know where we're exceeding expectations and where we might need to improve. The ROI has been clear, and our guests have given us great feedback on the program.*



**STEPHANIE WINKLER-HADLEY**  
DIRECTOR STORE OPERATIONS,  
SUR LA TABLE