



**Patrick Hanlon**, Contributor

ceo + founder of THINKTOPIA® an idea engineering company dedicated to creating communities

+ [Follow on Forbes](#)

## Successful Retail Not Just Plug And Play Any More

At the end of last year, Sears announced a closeout on over one hundred of its [Sears and Kmart](#) stores. Despite an increase in sales, [Best Buy](#) intends to cut some of its 1100 U.S. stores. [Nordstrom's](#) announces that it's moving more and more efforts online. Meanwhile, [commercial developers](#) are filling old Blockbuster, Circuit City and other dead zones with Chipotles, Paneras, and Smashburgers.



Boston's Newbury Street is changing the look of retailing

This is the changing scape of retail, as shoppers drift online seeking bargains and lower prices, especially along the commoditized aisles of consumer electronics, footwear and appliances.

Quantity, quality, and low prices have been the raison d'être for modern retailers—features nulled by the Internet's own ubiquity and easy parking via Barcalounger.

But the Internet isn't the total future. "Sometimes I just have to get out of the house!" cries one Chicagoland woman.

But "getting out" in itself isn't enough for today's shopper, and the death rattle at Sears should shake up any retailer. Malls used to be fat, drippy cultures featuring all that was sparkly, good and exciting in the world. Aisles were soaked in dopamine wonder and mall rats scurried from store to store, leaving only when security guards booted them out. Today, those vast hallways have become skinny monocultures with equal doses of DSW, [H&M](#), [Victoria Secret](#), Lucky Jeans, Zara and Sbarro from [Ocean City](#) to Oceanside.

Numbed by the mega square-footage of "big box" stores and sales staffs resigned to uncaring, shoppers today are seeking more dynamic experiences.

[editorial]



[The Reynolds Group Inc.] [www.thereynoldsgroupinc.com]

Property developer [Jamestown](#), based in [Atlanta](#), understands that it's not just plug and play anymore. "Malls have become a uniform experience," explains Michael Phillips, chief operating officer of Jamestown, a developer based in Atlanta, Georgia. Jamestown boasts dynamic retail concepts like [Chelsea Market](#) in [Manhattan](#) and Boston's [Newbury Street](#), among others. "The successes will be those who deconstruct that model."

Reshaping shopping experiences is important because, as consumers, we have been reshaped. Today, we experience high-end design at both ends of the retail chain (from Tiffany to Target), so we demand more unique products and experiences. "The woman who shops at Saks shops at Target," says Phillips. "They shop high and low together."

Jamestown's strategy is to be locally focused and nationally anchored. "For consumers to be compelled to come more often, you need to provide them with a dimensional shopping environment," advises Phillips. "It's essential to have the artist and start-up retailer next to the highly polished national retailer."

As retailers try to dodge the consumer death ray of indifference and zipped pocketbooks, they're trying new things.

Walgreens [new flagship store](#) launched earlier this month on its original 1926 site at the corner of State and Randolph in downtown Chicago, does for drugstores what "Star Wars" did for movies.

In a blockbuster effort to restyle their approach, [Walgreens](#) has abandoned the dumbed-down esthetics of floor-to-ceiling merchandise or furniture barn glare, and uses a variety of lighting styles to signal to shoppers that they are entering. Packaged goods are enhanced by lumens designed into the underside of store shelves. Lighting in the Nail Spa has all the allure of a Sephora. Gone are the days of the overhead uniglow.

The Virtual Makeover video kiosk in the LOOK Boutique lets women try on cosmetics (without the trial of messy a.k.a. "used" cosmetics) and a Nail Bar goes even further to promote Walgreens' cosmetics cred.

As merchants and developers try to chop away messy bits of retail gangrene, it's good to remind ourselves that times have changed since Moms and Dads stared with glossy-eyed wonder at rows of TVs, washing machines and Tide at bargain prices.

[editorial]



[The Reynolds Group Inc.] [www.thereynoldsgroupinc.com]

In today's times, plenitude and pricing alone grow wearisome, and conjure up no more excitement than the name Wannamaker might. These days, we shuffle through the aisles of amazon.com, *Tar-zhay*, and a streaming river of other stores both real and virtual. It's not just about products or prices or experiences alone in the real world. It's about the kismet of brain-smacking "stand in place" WTF transformations.

Developers and retailers like Sears, Best Buy, and JCPenney must remember not only Target's internal mantra that *Speed is life*. But also that, while we are always counseled to fit in, ultimately we celebrate those who stand out.

[editorial]



[The Reynolds Group Inc.] [[www.thereynoldsgroupinc.com](http://www.thereynoldsgroupinc.com)]