

Managing the New Retail Space

As winter arrives, multiple countries around the world are reporting a second wave of fast-rising COVID-19 infections. Governments respond by issuing advisories and regulations to cope. The safety of the retail floor particularly draws heightened interest as it is one of the physical spaces difficult to avoid in one's daily routine. Whereas we mostly have managed to avoid public contact for work and leisure by working from home and cancelling travel, it is almost impossible to completely forego the shopping routine to pick up life necessities, such as fresh food and pharmaceutical prescription. This short journey can put people dangerous within proximity to contract diseases.



Safety Guidelines for Retail

Various safety guidelines have been established by governments addressing risks at the retail space. Some common ones are collected below¹:

- Provide two meters (six feet) of space between shoppers,
- Limit the number of customers in the store,
- Avoid congested areas,
- Encourage customers to use hand sanitizers or wash hands,

- Encourage customers to shop alone instead of in groups, and supervise their children to keep social distance,
- Use outside premises for queueing and pickups,

¹ Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, International Council of Shopping Centers, National Retail Federation (U.S.A.); Retail Council, Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (Canada); HM Government (U.K.)

- For retail workers, employer should enforce the above recommendations as strict requirements, and require those who are sick to stay home.

While these recommendations seem optional, some retailers are taking steps to protect their shoppers and shielding themselves from possible legal liabilities. Many are investing in retail space technology for the benefit of their patrons and build up differentiating advantages to thrive in the eventual recovery.



Occupancy-based Entrance Control

A cost-effective tool to provide sufficient space between shoppers is to limit the number of people

inside the store. The technology is widely available and mature. It takes a precise people-counting sensor paired with a digital signage display at every entrance and exit to keep an accurate count of shoppers within the store, and provide real-time instructions to keep people out of the store should occupancy reach a dangerous level.

The same technology is applied to areas of a store where people are likely to congregate, such as the restrooms and fitting rooms. A clearly visible digital sign can easily inform the next guest that the space has reached its safe limits, to avoid unpleasant and unsafe experiences due to overcrowding.

The retailer should make sure that the people counting technology it acquires, which typically uses cameras to capture images for analysis, does not collect any personally identifiable information which may expose the retailer to privacy violation risks.



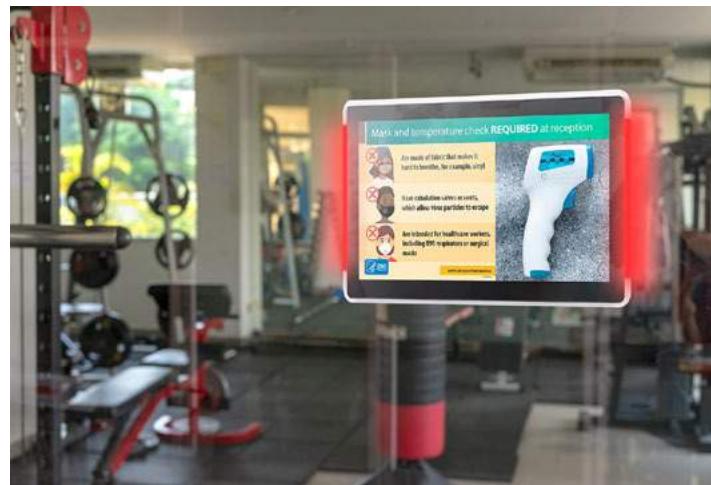
Enforcement of Regular Sanitization

Retail spaces need to be cleaned periodically to eradicate possible viruses left by store guests. For example, the fitting room should be scheduled for cleaning after a number of uses, and provide visual indication to the next shopper that the procedure has been carried out and the rooms are ready for use.

I have been involved in a project where a product with integrated motion sensor, programmable light, and NFC badge reader is deployed to automatically request cleaning for fitting rooms after the space

has been used. The light would indicate if the space has been properly sanitized by the cleaning crew, who must identify themselves with an NFC-based ID badge every time the cleaning is performed.

The fact that the retailer takes care of details like this gives the shopper peace of mind during the unavoidable shopping trip, and reinforces brand loyalty in a subtle way.



Start Experimenting Now

Retailers should not wait to get familiar with these technologies. It will take time from understanding the technical capabilities of the devices to establishing company-wide consensus and policy to protect the shoppers and staff members. Facility managers should immediately allocate a small budget to try out various technologies to see if they work for you. The solutions that work for your organization become your unique advantage to show your shoppers and employees that you are serious about their wellbeing.

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