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Retail innovator: Eataly

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Everyone is talking about innovation and it is particularly applicable to retail. Technology has freed retailers from mundane aspects of operations unleashing energy to innovate. An excellent example among the trendy food category is Eataly, the Italian Marketplace. Looking to expand in the U.S., Eataly is a crowd pleaser in Chicago and New York, as well as other locations in major cities around the world. Eataly innovatively combines related uses under one roof creating a theme park with the taste and sensations of an Italian marketplace making visitors feel they are there.

The New York Eataly, facing the Flat Iron building, has 50,000 s/f, 6 restaurants, 2 cafes, a bakery, butcher, mozzarella, salami, sandwich and rotisserie counters, fresh-produce stands, and 10,000 food-related or personal-care products. The merchandising and design are distinctive. For example, the restaurants are placed next to the "markets that provide the fresh ingredients." Customers see the ingredients, watch the preparation, eat the food, buy the ingredients and cookery to take home.

The five restaurants each with bar and tables are anchors at the edges of the selling space so everyone is bustling to find the next mini-venue. Tucked away in a corner is the greeting stand for the brewery 13 floors above the main hall. What makes Eataly unique is the total food experience. Not only can you watch, eat, browse, and buy, but there is culture. Guided tours of the store enlighten foodies on the culinary traditions of Italy and its products-a type of folk museum, a brick and mortar festival.

Eataly has numerous, diverse creators and collaborators. From the founder Oscar Farinetti, an Italian entrepreneur known for developing the largest consumer electronic business in Italy to the NY partnership of celebrity chef- restaurateurs Mario Batali and Lidia and Joe Bastianich. Techno-expert with chefs. That's innovation.

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