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**Right now in retail - by Carol Todreas**

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Right now retail is not first and foremost on most of our minds, that is, unless you are in the retail business. Yet, the retail scene goes on and there are, as usual, some interesting happenings to report. Just in case you have missed it, here is some news that you may not have noted grappling with Omicron, but still worth knowing:

1. Jeff Bezos did it again...designed a new concept in brick and mortar, Amazon Style, and for fashion, no less. What seems exciting about this store is it features a useful blend of technology and fashion. There will reportedly be double the fashion options and selections based on current Internet influencers. Using smart phones, customers can easily scan choices and the Amazon algorithms can help in determine which items are most flattering for each customer. Fitting rooms will be a personalized space where customers can use a screen and continue to shop. The first store is expected to be about 30,000 s/f, scheduled to open later this year in Los Angeles at Americana at Brand.

2. Prada, a major luxury fashion house, along with a few other big name fashion brands at the Men's Fall Fashion Show in Milan, made a marketing turn to focus on Boomers. Why, after all these years of marketing to younger customers? Because it has finally come out of the closet that Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964...who are now 57-75 years old) have considerable disposable income and like to spend it. This is a fact that has been well-known but up until now has been taboo and considered totally unfashionable to recognize. If this becomes a trend there will be more items designed and manufactured for Boomers and this will result in more brick and mortar stores.

3. "The Return Of Mixers" was noted in the New York Times on Thursday, January 27th. Essentially the message was that "singles" looking to meet eligible people to date were not finding online dating apps very satisfying. Too much protocol, registering, guessing, and not enough real time quality engagement with a prospect. They, therefore needed an in-person event, such as the mixer. While this is not directly a retail story, it does augur well for physical stores, showing that ultimately people want to be with other people, even younger than Boomer generations. Fatigue of screen time for dating ...not too far from fatigue of screen time for shopping.

4. Digitally native stores continue to open physical stores, even during the pandemic as online retail has surged. While it is true that study after study shows continual gains in online shopping, this does not deter Internet entrepreneurs from taking the plunge to off line retail. Brands that started a few years ago like Bonobos, Warby Parker, and Casper have continued to expand, and are still doing so. Physical retail can complement online sales and has been successful in bringing the customer closer to the product and ultimately strengthening brand loyalty.

Lastly the pandemic is ebbing, and while it does, retailers, landlords, developers, designers are busy readying for the return to "normalcy." No one really knows what that means. Many feel cooped up, many are still working from home, and many are getting ready themselves to simply go out and shop.(E-commerce sales have not risen more than 5% since 2020.) Bring on the retailers!

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