

Navigating the new hygiene standards in retail

 By [Michael Smollan](#)

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On a global scale, consumer facing industries have had to take exceptional precautions in a time of rapid change with business, people, processes and stakeholders retuning to adopt new approaches that will likely change retail management as we know it forever.



Anna Shvets via Pexels

Creating a safe and enjoyable retail experience has never been more critical or more sensitive to execute as demands may be unpredictable as 'business unusual' plays out and looks for stabilisation.

Regardless of the time it takes to recover or the pattern it follows, shoppers and employees will be hyper-sensitive to hygiene standards in-store for the foreseeable future and poor PR could be devastating for retailers and brands.



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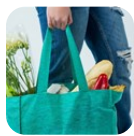
Sustaining consumer trust

An Advantage Smollan survey of 147 shoppers in the UK, revealed that highest levels of trust were felt in retailers providing maximum protection against Covid-19 through use of PPE in-store and social distancing measures.

Initially with full lockdown and significant restrictions on movement, retailers scrambled in order to reduce shopper stress around hygiene. Trends immediately began playing out from the very basics around scaling pickup and click and collect, adjusting store hours to simplifying supply chains, supporting vulnerable shoppers, in-store education and screening processes for employees and consumer.

As restrictions eased over the coming months, sustaining social distancing and lockdown protocols with in-store visits combined with encouraging contactless payments pickups and gradual re-opening, became the medium-term norm. Along with a new era of co-opetition as retailers collaborate on complementary ranges, and flexibility in workforces to cater for periodic store closures.

Retail implications with a lasting impact as society transforms will have to follow mandated processes to ensure full store network compliance to new hygiene standards as shoppers hold retailers more accountable than ever as trust and reputation become critical factors in their decision where to shop.



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Emerging trends suggest that we will see intermediaries operating in new retail channels with and without store partnerships. Up to 30% of store space is anticipated to go 'dark' with limited range robotic picking. Space reconfiguration will be accelerated, with a strong value focus including curated and budgeted production solutions.

Mobile product discovery will speed up and there will be a reduced tolerance for mediocre in-store experiences. An emphasis on health, wellness and community experiences in-store will partner with hygiene as an ongoing store performance metric.

Mandated and audited hygiene standards will include checking that footfall in stores is being effectively controlled with record compliance, to social distancing in-store, including for example the availability of hand sanitisers for customers. Wiping down of trolleys, baskets and checkout areas plus signage, posters, and floor stickers are now seen as mandatory when it comes to educating consumers.

Employee safety

Shopper wellbeing, while paramount, also needs to partner with employee safety concerns. From protective clothing and PPE equipment, to monitoring temperature checks and employee training on infection control measures.

An audit between Smollan and a global leader in FMCG was conducted from February to April 2020 to understand what precautionary measures were needed to be implemented at their distribution centres during the pandemic. The brief was to audit the safety aspects of employees, overall working conditions and the 'must haves' around sanitisers and, PPE equipment.

Based on the critical conditions and urgency, the input and data capturing were developed by implementing an app. Through the data received, effectiveness, consistency, quality and value add could be managed effectively.

As hygiene protocols are ramped up, retailers have been pushed to implement clear, stringent measures to ensure peace of mind. While we are by no means at the end of the pandemic, it is important to envision retail life in the future.



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Step-by-step audit solution

In light of that, Smollan launched a programme for retailers by developing a step-by-step audit solution. A pre-audit consultation allows for a set of standards to be defined that a particular outlet needs to comply with, followed by an independent outlet standard audit conducted by our team.

A full de-brief with the store manager to share results and ideas for improvement along with an online survey to understand employee perceptions, culminates in a post-audit report which analyses all the results to improve compliance, perception, and loyalty to build an actionable strategy.

Post-audit support, to assist retail, shopping centres or commercial outlets, identifies measures to boost the new way of working include hygiene ambassadors, commercial sanitisation, virtual advisors, and essential services packs. Recently Smollan partnered with Clicks to launch their private-label hand sanitisers.

Hygiene ambassadors were dispatched to 40 stores across South Africa to complement the launch and drive hygiene, education, and offer reassurance to shoppers.

We truly have a chance to do something extraordinary as we protect reputations and improve the shopper's experience. By saying "we are in this together" is certainly no sentiment, but instead a true reflection of our partnered intention to re-imagine our future.

ABOUT MICHAEL SMOLLAN

Mike Smollan is Chief Growth and Innovation Officer at Smollan.

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