

DIY is sprucing up the in-store experience

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Go in for some screws and come out with a fully-fitted kitchen – the in-store offering of DIY is unique and must be preserved



Shoppers will always want to touch, see and interact with products in the DIY category. Photograph: Alamy

I confess that my instinctive reaction to the recent inclusion of coffee shops and mini Argos units in Homebase stores was somewhat muted. As a DIY purist I saw these as unwelcome distractions in one of my most beloved destinations.

But I now feel differently. From a retail perspective there is no getting away from the fact that "experience" is everything and people are looking for a relationship – or at least an interaction – when in store. This is true for fashion, electrical and almost every other type of retail, so why not DIY?

Homebase and B&Q are heavily focused on opening up DIY opportunities to those who are less confident, breaking down traditional shopper barriers. Doing that live in-store and in an approachable manner is spot-on for a certain audience. Diversification of products in store also feeds the imagination. So long as it doesn't feel like being in a shopping mall, then it should be a big hit.

The traditional retail experience is arguably nowhere more important than in DIY, where you go in to buy 100 screws and walk out with 400 of different size and variety, some piping, new radiator valves, masking tape (just in case you've nearly run out) and an outdoor security light to boot.

You've enjoyed the experience and been inspired by the cross-category browsing. It's an experience that doesn't fully translate online, which is why many brands in the space still see in-store as the most important place to have a presence. For wood treatment brand Cuprinol, for example, getting secondary display in the garden section next to the sheds is vital.

The incorporation of slick in-store technology, such as digital screens offering project advice and 3D product imaging at Homebase, provide a rich, interactive customer experience that feels a far cry from the hardware stores of yore: Aladdin's cave-style retail outlets piled high with DIY knick-knacks.

Shoppers will always want to touch, see and interact with products in the DIY category, whether to find the right sized nail, the right width of a paintbrush or the exact shade of duck egg blue paint. Having recently had an architect at my house, I can say that real-life interaction with a real person trained in a specific skill opened my eyes to a world of possibilities I hadn't considered, despite a fair amount of time spent searching for inspiration online.

As tech advances to enhance the DIY retail offer both online and off, the category needs to invest in both innovation and excellent shopfloor service to create experiences beyond the transaction.

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Link: www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2014/jul/10/diy-in-store-experience-bq-homebase