

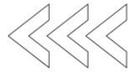


THE PANDEMIC PUSH FOR INNOVATION



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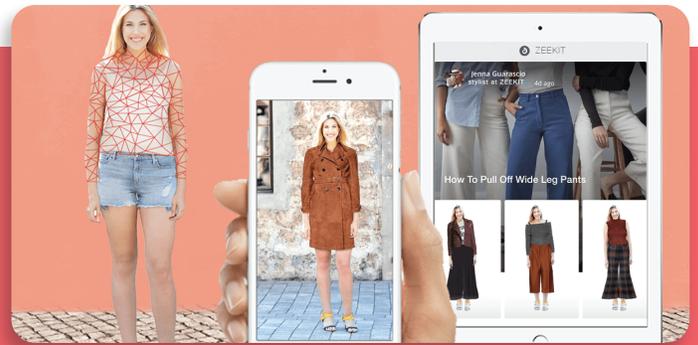


I think it is fair to say that we are all greatly anticipating June 15th and the official reopening of California after the past 15 months of restrictions brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our daily routines were thrown into turmoil as we had to relearn how to work remotely, how to go to school online, how to shop, how to eat and how to socialize from the comfort of our homes. However, as we look back with 20/20 hindsight on the year 2020 and the first half of 2021, the history books will show that many innovative changes resulting from the struggles of the pandemic were actually improvements to the retail landscape.

RETAIL TECHNOLOGY

The retail industry is filled with very creative minds and entrepreneurs. Even before Covid, many companies were investing a great deal of resources towards technological enhancements and improving their online presence. As a result, many of these businesses had a head start to navigate the changes brought on by the pandemic more easily while others scrambled to try to play catch-up. The pandemic forced

many retailers to expand and fine-tune their websites, their e-commerce platform, and their delivery programs to make them more convenient and user friendly.



Through these technological advancements, with just a few clicks on their computer or from their cell phone, one can now see how they look in a certain outfit, how a certain piece of furniture looks within your living room, or you can have a package or groceries show up on your doorstep. It also made online shopping more mainstream than it ever had before and helped push the average consumer to be more comfortable navigating these websites and online platforms.

NEW DINING SPACES

Some of the most creative retailers were the businesses deemed “Essential Businesses” as these were the businesses that remained open during the pandemic but needed to work around a series of new restrictions and other requirements to safely operate.



In addition to many sanitizing protocols that are now mandatory, many of these businesses found ways to alter their business model and found new ways to service their customers. For example, restaurants were able to expand their outdoor seating capacity by adding more tables to the sidewalks, parking lots or even the streets. This al fresco dining brought people back outside to socialize with each other and support their favorite local businesses creating a renewed sense of community. In addition, due to loosened regulations many restaurants began offering alcohol in to-go packages, and through cooperation with their landlords, many set up curbside pickup parking spaces. While these may have originally been temporary measures to assist restaurants, generally speaking, the customer embraced these new additions and would welcome these on a more permanent basis. Many cities also have seen the benefits of these temporary measures and at least in the City of San Diego, the al fresco dining opportunities are being extended until July 2022.



SOCIAL CREATURES

For some time, people have been predicting the death of retail as we know it, mainly due to increased e-commerce and the struggles

of many brick and mortar companies, and many may think that the pandemic is going to accelerate that process. However, even though many companies have enhanced their online shopping experience and more and more people now see how easy it is to shop from home, as June 15th gets closer, we are also reminded that we are social creatures and engaging with others on a regular basis is not only something that we seek, but also something that we need. We all realized how much we missed shopping for that perfect outfit at the mall, a night out at our favorite restaurant

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or having a few drinks with friends. We missed going to the movies, going to our favorite fitness class, or going to a concert or a ballgame.

Retail will continue to evolve, and no one knows for sure what retail will look like in the future, but one thing that seems to be clearer than ever is that there’s nothing that quite equals the feelings, emotions and camaraderie of these experiences on a first-hand basis.

