
THE FASHION BUSINESS
Drapers

The New Roles in Fashion Retail

By Jill Geoghegan

January 11, 2018

Drapers Next Generation, now in its ninth year, turns the spotlight on young fashion retail professionals and the industry changes shaping their careers today.

The retail workforce is radically different from five years ago. Fashion businesses today recruit for skills in ecommerce, social, data and analytics in a bid to keep up with changing customer behaviour and expectations, as well as their competitors.

In 2016, global online sales accounted for 17% of total retail sales, and Planet Retail RNG forecasts this will increase to 29% of total spend by 2020. The rise of online shopping will continue to change the industry and retail roles must change with it. As shoppers increasingly turn to clicks rather than bricks for their transactions, what are the implications for staff in warehouses, head offices and in stores? Drapers asks recruitment experts how retail roles are changing and what skill sets the next generation of retail talent need to have to stay ahead.

Robot wars

All aspects of retail employment will change in the coming years, predicts [Fran Minogue](#), managing partner at executive search company Clarity: from warehouses “that will be more automated with robots doing the bulk of the labour-intensive jobs”, through to buying and merchandising, which will be “plugged into data, marketing and trend teams”.

“Transformation director, strategy director – it’s all about shifting the mindset and making the customer key”

James Hyde, Flint Hyde

“Data analytics will be key,” adds Minogue. “We’ll see a lot more data scientists coming to the fore as algorithms become ever more important [in joining up the customer journey].” She cites the example of cruise ships, which use algorithms to predict when and where their customers and their families will shop, based on the data they have about them. Operators then build that into the marketing to make sure it is proactive and tailored to each individual.

This personalised approach will be vital for retailers, agrees James Hyde, director of executive search firm Flint Hyde: “There is a real shift in the market and the industry is introducing new roles to deal with the

change. Transformation director, strategy director – it’s all about shifting the mindset and making the customer key,” he says. “We’ll see a lot more of that. Retailers need to give the customer what they want. Stocking shelves and expecting that to be enough doesn’t work. You’ve got to listen to the customer.”

Customer-built

Developing a customer-centric approach and leveraging the relatively new role of the chief customer officer will be key, says Caroline Pill, vice-president of executive search at Kirk Palmer Associates. [House of Fraser](#) was one of the first retailers to introduce the role in March 2015, and [Misguided](#), [Tesco](#), [McArthurGlen](#) and [Mothercare](#) have since introduced this position into their top teams.

“Chief customer officer is another position that will evolve,” asserts Pill. “Bringing the customer to all products on and offline through one point of view is essential.”

“Service will need to be even more special”

Caroline Pill, Kirk Palmer Associates

Clarity’s Minogue believes the chief operating officers of the future will come from a customer-centric, ecommerce background: “[CEOs] won’t come from operations or buying and merchandising, which have been the classic routes to the top in the past. The chief customer officer, who looks after strategy, marketing and the customer, will be key in the future. Retailers will start with the customer and build from there.”

Digital integration

This integrated approach to retail and linking the digital with the physical will also be integral to future retail roles, as businesses adapt to changing consumer demands, says Pill: “Retail roles need to change with consumer behaviour. That connection between online and offline has not been addressed in a lot of ways. Brands have lots of data online about what you have been browsing and what you have bought in the past. This needs to be integrated within stores, so that if you live in London but walk into a store in Paris, the store staff know your shopping history and can show you the specific products you are interested in.”

She adds that store staff need access to data to improve customer service and experience: “Service will need to be even more special. It’s all well and good having artificial intelligence, gadgets and digital screens, but at the end of the day, stores need to sell product and they need to know who they are selling to, so they can offer them exactly what they want.”

Advisory roles

Indeed, the role of the shop assistant will change dramatically as spend continues to migrate online, argues Valentina Alteri, senior recruitment consultant of retail and head office at TRP Recruitment.

“There will no longer be sales assistants,” says Alteri. “Store staff will be required to tailor every shopping experience to each individual. In some cases that might mean hiring a space convenient to a top client, dispatching products they will be interested in to it and giving them a one on one personal styling session.”

“Store staff will be required to tailor every shopping experience to each individual”

Valentina Alteri, TRP Recruitment

“Job titles will reflect this change and we will see a move towards ‘client advisers’,” she adds. “They will have their own business cards and create their own network. They will reach out to their customers on social media and send them personal recommendations. Shops won’t be able to rely on passing footfall any more – it will be about creating that demand.”

A swell of technological advancements and an increasingly demanding and time-poor consumer are shifting the retail landscape. Roles of the future will be even more focused on the customer and informed by their data. Indeed, intelligent use of customer data will be crucial in all aspects of businesses, from trend forecasting and buying, down to the design of homepages, but also in store – and retailers need to invest in their teams accordingly.

While online and data will continue to grow in importance, training for store staff will also be key. Stores will remain an important part of the retail offer, but staff will need to offer a more interactive and informative experience to drive that all-important footfall.