

“NEW RETAIL”

In an era (= *tijdperk*) that is predominantly (= *vooral*) online, where we can scroll to buy a T-shirt or sneakers or order a meal without leaving our comfortable armchair (= *zetel*), what is the role of traditional shops or restaurants?

A research team from the University of Antwerp concluded that shops and restaurants, alongside the internet, are and will remain an additional channel for contact with customers.

They are of great importance to turnover and will continue to be so. Having a strategic location, offering a unique range (= *assortiment*) of products, continuing to use the shop window as a visual eye-catcher, a sustainable (= *duurzaam*) menu, and so on, remain important.

But there is more, namely: what happens inside?

Research shows that a turning point has been reached in the interior design of physical shops and restaurants: today's and tomorrow's points of sale have a new design based on interaction with the public, taking the shopping and dining experience one step further.

Example: shops that target younger generations have evolved into “Instagrammable spaces” that encourage content creation and offer memorable experiences. These experiences not only attract customers to the shops, but also generate valuable (= *waardevol*) advertising via social media.

Example: tomorrow's restaurants will focus on convenience (= *gemak*), personalisation, technology and sustainability (= *duurzaamheid*). Concepts that respond to these trends include flexible formats such as food trucks and pop-ups, automated ordering systems (such as kiosks and drive-thrus) and personalised offers.

Elements such as technology (AI!) or sustainability, reducing environmental impact, improving energy efficiency and promoting a positive impact on customer well-being (= *welzijn*) have all become indispensable (= *onontbeerlijk*) in new retail and restaurant concepts.

Rebranding and remodeling

Standaard Boekhandel recently launched a new look, with both its logo and corporate identity given a facelift. But the physical shops also underwent a metamorphosis. They were remodelled to incorporate digital signage as an integral part of the new concept, reinforcing the brand identity.

The new Standaard Boekhandel shop is fully in line with the company's new brand identity. The choice of materials and colours evokes (= *oproepen*) a homely atmosphere, with all attention focused on the books.

'We are giving our shops a complete makeover,' says Guido De Smet, Sales Director at Standaard Boekhandel. 'This means that the shop windows, signage and brand identity have been modernised and we are integrating digital screens into these shops.'

With the screens in the shop window and at the checkout (= *kassa*), Standaard Boekhandel can now communicate dynamically, allowing the retailer to showcase books even more, communicate promotions and strengthen its brand identity.

Research has shown that modernising the shops was necessary in order to stay in touch with the consumers of the future. For example, Young Adults, the fastest growing reader group, have been given a contemporary (= *eigentijds*) space where they can read and browse through the range of books and magazines to their heart's content.

'We have a strong brand that is top of mind in Flanders. Consumers see Standaard Boekhandel as honest and reliable (= *betrouwbaar*). This is partly thanks to our local roots,' says Guido De Smet. 'But young people don't really see us as cool, modern, adventurous or in tune with the times. Some of the shops were also a bit outdated. We now want to write one big new story.'

Books are once again taking centre stage in the product range and store concept, both in the shop window and on the tables in the store. Standaard Boekhandel opted for a warm, homely, contemporary style, for example with a small table with an armchair, lamp and plants in the shop window, but also prominent screens at the front and behind the cash register: the retailer is embracing the digital world.

There is no revolution, but the retailer is paying more attention to the customer experience. 'We opted for calm materials and light colours, so that all attention goes to the products. The round tables invite you to walk around them and explore the range. The different departments are more clearly indicated.' New is the cash desk furniture with rounded shapes. 'That furniture should not be a barrier; we focus on proximity (= *nabijheid*) between our employees and our customers.'

The main themes in the range are reading, learning, giving and experiencing. E-books and e-readers are given plenty of space in the shop: they are selling very well. Bongobons, games and stationery (= *schrijfmateriaal*) also remain important. Newspapers and magazines and the lottery play a particularly important role in village centres, where the newspaper shop has often already disappeared.

Standaard Boekhandel usually applies the publisher's (= *uitgever*) recommended retail price for books. This recommended retail price applies in both the shop and the online shop – discounts are possible. The shop offers promotions (via leaflets or special offers) and with the loyalty card you can save points that entitle you to a discount voucher that you can use on your next purchase.

Standaard Boekhandel staff are generally considered to be customer-friendly, which is partly attributed to the company's investment in the personal and professional development of its employees. Guido De Smet emphasises the importance of employees who work with heart and soul, which is reflected in their interaction with customers.

An important lever (= *hefboom*) for the success of the new store concept is the staff, who are approachable and accessible to customers. Contact must be accessible, personal and direct, while the staff member pays sufficient attention to customers and their needs.

The Standaard Boekhandel logo with its iconic owl had been a great success for 40 years. With the rebranding, the owl was given a fresh look, with the book taking centre stage and vibrant colours giving the logo a contemporary touch.



‘Our designers got to work with the new logo and created a fun logo animation to add more dynamism to the messaging on the digital screens,’ says Guido De Smet. ‘Standaard Boekhandel’s campaigns are extended to the digital screens, with our creative team converting the campaign image into a dynamic animation.’

Guido De Smet concludes: ‘We want to continue to claim market leadership, strengthen our position and attract new customers, especially young people and families. We currently have a very female and 35+ audience. We want to broaden that.’

Experience stores

With a new retail concept of “experience stores”, e5 Mode aims to better connect with the customer's world.

The goal of the renovation is to offer better service and make the shopping experience more enjoyable. The product range will also be expanded. The renovations are part of the first investment project of e5's new CEO, Alexander Talpe.

"We certainly still see a role for physical stores, but they must offer added value. It's a matter of finding the formula that best suits what customers want. The stores are now more like collection shops, with more products: not just clothing, but also shoes, sunglasses... This means that customers can go to e5 for the complete look.

The new shop concept is also being continuously adjusted. 'In my opinion, testing and adjusting is the best way to keep up with the changing retail market,' says Talpe.

e5 Mode focuses on the mid-range segment of the clothing market. According to their own philosophy, they strive for "high-quality, stylish and, above all, comfortable clothing... with excellent value for money.

They regularly offer significant promotions: discounts of up to 70% are reported during sales.



'The look and feel of the shops has been improved by adding stylish décor, plants and other interior elements,' says Talpe. "We are also focusing on a more practical layout. We have incorporated rest areas, such as a reading and coffee corner, where partners who are not shopping can relax for a while.

There are more fitting rooms (=paskamers), with a special fitting room for those who use our personal shoppers, and the collection is being expanded. The cash register is now located in the centre of the shop, so there is an immediate point of contact. In this way, we want to make our shops a place where people can find inspiration and where they like to come back."

e5's personal shoppers help customers select clothing and other products by providing advice and shopping on their behalf, often with the aim of helping the customer find their style, save time or boost their confidence. The personal shopper offers support in selecting clothing that suits the customer's body type, lifestyle and budget.

This seems to be working: the retailer is attracting more shoppers again, who are also returning more often, according to Talpe. Thirty per cent of customers who use the personal shoppers are new customers or people who had previously stopped shopping there.

While many in the fashion sector are struggling to keep up, e5 has seen its turnover grow by almost 10%. This is the third year in a row that the Belgian company has achieved such strong growth. With new locations in city centres, it aims to reach even more urban shoppers.

e5 says that its strategy to strengthen its position in Flanders is paying off. It attributes this to a revamped store concept focused on personal service, an expansion in the number of locations and a focus on timeless fashion.



"An important key to our success is the fact that over the past three years we have been able to broaden our audience to a clientele that reflects the age pyramid of Flanders. We will therefore continue to focus on this with the design of our shops and the choice of our own and purchased collections.

Together with our investments in efficiency and the development of our webshop, we are outperforming the market year after year," says Talpe. In order to realise its ambition of being within a quarter of an hour's reach of every Flemish person, the fashion retailer wants to fill five more blind spots with roadside shops (= *baanwinkels*).

In addition, e5 is focusing on new locations in city centres, where it wants to reach fashion-conscious urban shoppers even better. The e5 webshop is also experiencing strong growth, with an average increase in turnover of 10% per year since 2021.

Restyling: more fresh, more comfort

Since the beginning of 2024, Aldi has already renovated 100 Belgian stores. The discount chain wants to add more than 60 supermarkets to this by the end of 2026.

Aldi recently announced with pride that the chain has succeeded in transforming 100 stores to the latest concept of the formula. This means that there will be more emphasis on fresh products such as bread, vegetables and fruit. Changes are also being made to the interior, including new furniture, LED lighting and wider aisles (= *gangen in de winkel*), which should make shopping more pleasant.

ALDI works on the principle of “always low prices” instead of constantly offering high discounts or temporary promotions. ALDI's business model is very “lean”: small shops, limited staff, simple shop layout and minimal decoration to keep operating costs low.

Many products are Aldi's own brands (up to ~90%). This allows them to buy cheaper and without the margin associated with A-brands.



The renovation of ALDI supermarkets encompasses (= *omvat*) several key pillars.

ALDI is placing fruit, vegetables, meat and fish more prominently, often right at the front of the shop. Some shops are being significantly expanded, which will provide space for a wider range of products and a more comfortable shopping experience. The new layout makes it easier to fill your shopping trolley (= *winkelkar*) from the entrance.

All shops will be equipped with CO₂ cooling, heat recovery systems and solar panels, among other things. The refurbishment will also look at improving parking spaces, entrances and exits, and charging facilities for electric cars.

ALDI will continue to work efficiently, for example by presenting products on pallets and using packaging tailored to the shelves.

The company is building a green distribution center (similar to the one in Turnhout) with sustainability certificates, numerous solar panels, and other eco-friendly measures.

According to the German discounter, customers are responding very positively to the new stores, which is why the supermarket chain is determined to continue its restyling. Sixty additional stores are planned for renovation by the end of 2026. "Together with our employees, we've developed a plan that will make the store renovation process simple and structured, and that will involve all 7,000 employees in our new commercial strategy," says Sales Director Benjamin Vanagt.

"Besides the renovated stores, it's also our employees who make the difference. This is especially true in our business, where productivity and customer service are crucial to making a difference," says Dimitri Bataillie, HR Director. Employees who feel good are what the HR team strives for. The average length of service of twelve years proves that the efforts are paying off. "People who feel good do more and also attract new people. We involve them in initiatives to further improve the work atmosphere."

"All our employees are 'Aldi's Toppers,'" explains Dimitri. "It goes without saying: they are our employees, and each and every one of them is top-notch. They ensure that ALDI makes a difference for our customers every day."

