

Shopping the future, right now



By [Robyn Cooke](#)

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I was in Seattle in October last year. Instead of swinging by Nordstrom for a bit of fashion shopping, I headed straight for Amazon Go. I had read so much about this 'no queues, no tills' shopping experience that I wanted to try it for myself.



Robyn Cooke, TFG.

Mostly what I had heard was that “you will feel like you are stealing when you walk out without paying”. Or that it was only going to increase theft because of the lack of staff and controls.

I am here to tell you that the seamless pairing of technology and bricks shopping was absolute perfection. I walked out with the overwhelming sensation that “this feels like shopping in the future.”

You start with the app on your phone – you just link your card like you do with any wallet app. In fact, if you already have your cards linked to your Amazon profile, you don’t even need to do that. Just login.

You scan yourself into the store – it’s really safe as you simply can’t enter the store at all without scanning your app/payment card. And then you shop. When you are done, you walk out without any further fuss.



So what did I learn from that, that I can apply to my job as head of e-commerce at TFG?

If we didn't know it already, we certainly do now – technology is the single most important investment that retailers need to make, in order to ensure that their fashion stores stay relevant. Transforming traditional retail into shopping fit for future generations, isn't just about the colour of the season, it is also going to take clever, strategic, digital innovations – through every customer touch point, on- and off-line.

I also confirmed for myself that there needs to be a seamless relationship between smartphones, stores, online shopping, chatting to customer services, social media sharing and experiences. It just all has to work together to give the South African shopper the full retail encounter that they are coming to expect from modern retailers. They want freedom and lots of choice. We need to offer that seamlessly.

I certainly learned that the actual experience of shopping is just as important as the products I am shopping for. If we retailers are to keep our customers coming back for more, we need to make the experience enjoyable, rich in content, always up-to-date and fresh every time. It also needs to resonate with our values, our personality and our lifestyle. Give the customer convenience every time!



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And finally, I learned that we have to be bold and innovative and try things that no one else has done before – because customers are evolving and changing all the time. What worked yesterday is not necessarily going to work in the future. What has been designed by men, for men, won't always work for the modern woman (who, by the way, does most of the online shopping in South Africa).

It's a tiny bit ironic that Amazon Go inspired me to come back from my trip and launch a new marketplace for TFG, into the South African space – designed to really capitalise on all these learnings.

PS: Once I left Amazon Go, I did pop into Nordstrom. I mean, what woman can pass up that opportunity?

ABOUT ROBYN COOKE

Robyn Cooke is head of e-commerce at TFG. She has worked as a marketing leader in the technology and internet field for over 20 years for some of the globe's largest companies based out of London. Robyn returned to Cape Town to merge this experience with her first love, fashion and was South Africa's first fashion blogger, commentator and stylist, and ran the popular blog www.robyncooke-styleguide.co.za, since 2008...

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