

The Greatest Myth in Retail: How Two Women are Debunking the Retail Apocalypse & Disrupting the Industry

We've all read the stories: brick and mortar stores are dying, chains are hanging up their spurs, Amazon is ascendant, and nobody wants to shop anymore. Pick up any business publication, and you could be forgiven for thinking that the retail industry is in its death throes.

Anita Gatto and Sarah Ivory, ex-corporate marketing executives and founders of Self Employed, the brand strategy and experiential marketing agency, believe that this narrative has got it all wrong and they've set out to disrupt the retail industry for good.

"Retail isn't dead, it's going through a hugely exciting revolution," explained CoFounder and Chief Creative Officer Sarah Ivory. "In our hyperconnected world, people are craving the human experience, and increasingly want a more experiential way of shopping. We've discovered a niche in delivering those experiences via innovative popups and retail installations that are reenergizing mall traffic. As a result, we provide our clients, including Westfield Group and South Coast Plaza, with brand discovery and never been done before experiences."

Self Employed is a modern, results driven experiential agency that provides turnkey marketing solutions: providing the human experience of an ad campaign while creating enduring and emotive memories for target audiences and the media to keep brands relevant and lasting. Their mission is to communicate the value of brands to the right audience using authenticity and integrity, backed up by the latest technology, hottest trends, and best talent. And while many big box department stores are faltering and failing to keep up with shifts in consumer preferences, Self Employed sees that shift as leaving a huge window of opportunity open for others if they know how to take advantage of it.

"I hired Self Employed to execute all of our pop ups at the new Westfield Century City, confident they would deliver a fantastic retail experience. What they delivered was even greater bringing fresh ideas for the project with each iteration, and taking our expectations a step further, including identifying and securing additional partners," adds Heather Vandenberghe, former Chief Marketing Officer, Westfield.

Debra Gunn Downing, Executive Director of Marketing for South Coast Plaza similarly praised Self Employed unique approach to experiential marketing: "Popups are a significant aspect of our extensive efforts to keep our retail collection dynamic and attract more visitors to South Coast Plaza. Self Employed has brought us interesting concepts that we've been able to incorporate into our leasing program."

The data backs them up: 98 percent of Gen Z consumers buy in store some or most of the time, but overwhelmingly prefer spending money on experiences and purchases that

provide meaning and have emotional charge and resonance rather than material objects. No wonder why premium retailers, who excel at providing this, have seen their revenues soar more than 80 percent over the last five years. In fact, retail spending as a whole is on the rise, yet most retailers are stuck in the 20th century era of marketing.

“We recognized the dilemma both brands and retail developers were facing and decided to be the solution,” said Co Founder and Chief Strategist Anita Gatto. “Everything we do starts with brand strategy. On the brand side, we work as an integrated part of the executive team, bringing a wealth of experience and expertise to a role where a single CMO might sit. With our retail developer clients, we design a strategy that will invite the most exciting brands on the planet to their centers and then we go out and secure that plan.”

Self Employed works with some of the largest retailers and lifestyle brands operating today, from Moet Hennessy to Kylie Cosmetics to Fourpost, an innovative new multi brand concept store which bills itself as a shopping destination for the modern family. They provide creative campaigns that include brand positioning and marketing strategy, custom events, influencer and celeb relations, product development, and licensing, as well as coveted brand strategy sessions which provide high intensity, high reward workshops for new and existing companies. Their services center on the idea of manifesto marketing: helping a company build a full, authentic, and exciting brand, rather than just getting them featured in an article.

How could a digitally native brand function in a physical space without traditional retail experience, you ask? “We developed Pop 360 as an a la carte, turnkey solution for brands that need additional resources or bandwidth to make their entrance into the retail landscape. It includes everything from design and buildout to staffing, inventory and merchandising. We’re committed to keeping overhead really low and putting budget where it should be: on the work and value being produced,” adds Gatto.

“We bring an East Coast work ethic and West Coast attitude which makes for a friendly, yet fast acting workplace environment and a top end suite of services,” said Sarah Ivory. “There’s a retail revolution happening, and we are proud and excited to be at the forefront.”

<https://forbesmiddleeast.com/how-two-women-are-debunking-the-retail-apocalypse>