



Selling the Magic

New Times Square Disney Store delivers awe **21st-century** style

BY BARBARA THAU

Rapunzel, Mickey Mouse and Pocahontas have some new, splashy digs. The characters' latest home is the new Disney Store in New York City's Times Square, designed to offer a highly immersive shopping experience for the digitally wired, millennial generation.

The store, Disney's largest in North America, will serve as the blueprint for the company's 360-unit retail business. The 20,000-sq.-ft., two-level store, in the center of the iconic "crossroads of the world," is expected to be the retailer's highest sales store, says Steve Finney, senior vice president of global operations, Disney Store.

The new Disney Store "is more of a destination than a retail store," Finney says. "The idea is to deliver the best 30 minutes of a child's day in an immersive, interactive environment."

The store is the latest, modern expression of Disney's long-standing DNA: experiential retailing — which is an extension of its theme-park ethos.

"We compete based on an experience, emotion and immersion like Disney," says Neal Lassila, vice president of global information technology for Disney. "That's opposed to [competing] on price and hawking a doll for \$19.99. There is no sales pressure technique." Instead, it's about delivering "a great time."

"We wanted it to feel organic," Finney adds.

To that end, the company set out to create an environment akin to Disney's theme parks. Trees

on which high-definition animation is projected pepper the space and are controlled by the staff, or, in Disney speak, "cast members." They change with the season or Disney theme, so that one week they might have a "Toy Story" feel while the following week the trees might be all things Rapunzel.

A circular pixie dust trail serves as a sparkling walkway to guide shoppers throughout the second floor, which is designed with an eye toward spaciousness and leaves ample room for strollers.

It also encourages shoppers to wander through a variety of sections, "rather than a store built on a 90-degree angle or a grid," Finney says.

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Disney Store

For the digitally wired set

With this store, Disney set out to wow kids — whose consumption of media and entertainment is largely digital — in the language that they're accustomed to speaking, but with a magical twist that ignites a sense of wonder and engagement.

That's why it was "important to imbed technology into the store," Finney says.



Fast Facts on Disney Times Square

- Disney transformed a 20,000-sq.-ft. space in New York's Times Square, the site of a former Virgin Megastore, into a two-level, state-of-the-art, interactive retail destination.
- More than 11,000 guests will visit the Disney Store in Times Square each day and shop more than 1,850 products.
- The store features the Pixie Dust Trail that leads shoppers through a variety of departments; a 20-ft. Disney Princess Castle with Magic Mirror; and the Disney Theatre with a 12-ft.-long curved screen.
- Disney Times Square also includes exclusive Disney-themed, New York-inspired merchandise; a three-ft.-tall handpainted vinylmation Mickey and exclusive vinylmation figures; an expanded and exclusive product line for grownups; and, marking a first in a Disney store, a comprehensive Marvel product assortment.
- Disney's love affair with New York City dates back to 1928, when Mickey Mouse made his debut in "Steamboat Willie" at the Colony Theater. In 1964, Walt Disney debuted the "It's A Small World" attraction at the New York World's Fair.
- Disney Store is an international retailer with 220 retail locations in North America, 100 in Europe and 40 in Japan.



For one, the back of the second floor is devoted to the 20-ft.-high Princess Castle, which Cinderella, Tinker Bell and Tiana call home and where the showstopper is the talking "Magic Mirror." Children can wave a wand in front of the mirror and a Disney princess in an animated film clip magically appears in the mirror.

An RFID chip makes the magic, pulling the strings behind the curtain to bring the princess to life. Every new store that opens will feature this technology, Finney says.

The company also set out to "display animation on a surface and space you're not familiar with ... so it feels different from when you're watching it at home. It's more immersive," Finney says.

For one, Marvel animation is projected on a spinning LCD screen that looks like a rocket ship. In the theater area, a movie screen is close to the floor and curved to create a more novel experience for kids used to watching television and videos on flat-screen TVs.

In a bid for interactivity, the store also features Ridemakerz, a car-building station where, with the help of a cast member, a child can put together a toy (based on the Pixar movie "Cars") of his own design, choosing the tires, decals and accessories.

Mobile checkout

In partnership with Oracle, Disney worked to deliver mobile POS systems so shoppers can spend more time engaging in the store experience than waiting in line to check out.

The retailer worked with Oracle partner Infogain on a mobile point-of-service solution that enables cast members to complete check-out transactions from anywhere in the store using portable, hand-held miniature registers. The system also e-mails shoppers receipts.

The company expressly chose not to include the ability for shoppers to pay with their smartphones. “We don’t want them running around the store with their heads down, signing into a social app [to pay], missing the show,” Finney says. “It seems counterintuitive to the social experience.”

The mobile feature is one facet of a new Oracle POS system. It’s designed to handle high volumes of transactions, move shoppers quickly through checkout, capture data on customer buying patterns and track item performance in Disney locations worldwide.



What’s more, Oracle has set up a single, nimble system that enables the business to localize the store offerings based on customer preferences. The overall design of Disney Times Square has been “driven by kids and moms who have grown up with technology and are not scared” of it, Finney says.

“We’re trying to use [technology] to animate activity and personalize their store visit.”

To stay in step with the buzz across Disney’s many platforms,

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the store also employs new technology that enables it to freshly reflect the brand outside the retail space. That means the store can digitally download up-to-the-minute content, so when a new movie comes out, for example, the store’s theater screen, trees and magic mirror can all reflect that.

Something new is always afoot, Finney says. The Disney Channel is in 220 million households; about eight Disney movies are launched every year; and there’s also Radio Disney. “If the store can’t keep up with that media message, we look out of synch,” Finney says.

“Everything we do in the store has to be bigger than life. We are a bigger than life brand.”

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