



# WWD VOICES: RETAIL'S RESPONSIBLE RESET PODCAST – EPISODE 6

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:00:00]** Despite explosive e-commerce growth over the past 18 months, the majority of sales are done in a physical store. But in this evolving retail market, physical stores have a more critical and important role to play. Welcome to WWD Voices, where we share the latest fashion, apparel and retail industry insights. Welcome to WWD Voices I am Arthur Zaczekiewicz, executive editor of WWD and today, as part of the Retailers Responsible Reset series with Accenture, we'll be talking with Accenture retail managing director Jill Standish with special guest Jaryn Bloom who's the group president of retail for Michael course. Welcome all. How are you guys doing today? Great.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:00:52]** How are you, Arthur?

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:00:53]** I'm good.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:00:54]** Hi, Jill.

**Jill Standish [00:00:55]** Hi, Jaryn. Nice to see you to hear your voice.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:00:59]** So just before we dove into these questions, you guys know each other, right? This is a side of you. Have you have a little background together, right from the industry?

**Jill Standish [00:01:09]** Yes, as a matter of fact.

Yeah. And it was funny because we we actually ran into each other at an event. The tennis was kind of a mutual interest of both of us. We actually ran into each other at the U.S. Open. That was what was fun.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:01:26]** We're actually working with Accenture Group as we embark upon this amazing digital transformation for the brand. So it was fun to see Jill and all of her colleagues at this great tennis match. Actually, the tennis match wasn't great, but it was fun to hang out with all you folks.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:01:43]** Was yeah, we, you know, we know that this digital transformation is part of a kind of a larger story. And today we're going to be talking about the, you know, physical stores. But Jill, first off, you know what we think about retailers responsible reset and the repurposing of the store and what comes to mind, what do merchants need to rethink and repurpose?

**Jill Standish [00:02:04]** Yeah. I mean, listen, we've all been through. I guess we're all probably sick of hearing what's been going on over the last nine 19 months. It's not 18 months now, it's 19. And I think the couple of things that changed all of us as human beings is one we became really hyper localized. We all care about our downtown. We care about the community



that we live in, we care about our local stores, we care about the people that work in those stores. So we all became very sensitive to our local community because we lived in this bubble for the last 19 months. Now we're actually getting very hyper transparent. I like to say because we're looking at where is inventory, where is it? Because I think all of us have experienced maybe waiting for something that was back, ordered or waiting for, you know, whatever it is. It just seems like because of what's going on with the supply chain, stores become a really interesting place for making sure you have security of supply. If I see you got it, I'm going to hop in my car and go, get it because if I order it online. I don't know because of this supply issue that we've got.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:03:14]** It could come. It could not.

**Jill Standish [00:03:16]** Yeah. So so stores to me really is the physical representation of brands. And I think we've all really appreciated them over the last 19 months having something local and and having that place to go and place to shop. So. So it's a wild ride over the last 18 months,

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:03:38]** so it's so jarring, I think, you know, if you could from from your perspective in the market.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:03:44]** Yeah, you know, listen, for the last 19 months, we've all been cooped up and there's been so much emphasis across all industries about e-commerce and digital acceleration. I've been in the fashion industry for a long time and I've seen the digital age evolve. But what is the physical store play in this shopping ecosystem? First of all, most of our business is done in stores. Stores are an important part of our brand expression. I mean, I personally look at how our brand approaches the entire ecosystem across both the digital and physical space with an understanding on how to maximize and leverage both. So if you take the best of modern conveniences the digital experience offers, especially as of late, but combine it with the one on one personal touch that you get in a store to unlock the true potential

between the brand and the consumer. Well, that's the unlock. When shopping in stores is fine, it still has lifestyle appeal. We make it fun, and if there's a value and then customers will absolutely see the value. Listen, stores can introduce you to a brand one that you might not have been, might not have been on your radar, you might not have been searching for. You could ask the store on the way to work or dinner. And as folks, we are going out to dinner so they may. There's plenty of folks that aren't necessarily going back to shopping centers and malls, but I don't know about you, Jill or Arthur, but it's not so easy to get a restaurant reservation in New York City is for sure. So, you know, it was in stores bringing to life the brand experience in a way that you just don't get from a screen or a phone. And if done right, you see the product displayed in a way that tells the brand story. And of course, it's the inventory and the ownership. And then, you know, the manner in which the associates navigate you through that inventory and the supply chain issues that can make the difference. Listen, in a store, you can touch and feel the product. You can interact live honestly as opposed to going to a website and making a decision based on how it looks on a model that often doesn't look like you listen. It helps to avoid the hassle of returns and strengthens the bond between the brand and the consumer. And actually, you can minimize the customer's desire to return. I think it's a hassle. You're maximizing your presence in that customer's closet.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:06:00]** Jane, you said something that I think during where we were preparing for this episode today, you said that your friends went out and they and they found the experience after 19 months now joyful.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:06:14]** So, you know, most recently, two friends of mine spent the day in New York City shopping. And by the way, those are two shopaholics. I had dinner with them right after that, and one friend mentioned, had she, how she'd been feeling depressed. COVID has certainly created feelings of depression and anxiety and isolation. And the other agreed, and they both went on to tell me that the day they spent shopping was the first time they felt alive



in 18 months since we've been locked up for a year and a half. And for sure, some folks that weren't before as comfortable shopping online are now comfortable shopping from the couch but searching through endless products. I don't know about you, but I want to be catered to. I want someone to do it for me. I want to see people. I want to interact with folks again. So Arthur, really? Indeed, in-store therapy is real. Physical stores are not dead. They're actually just waking up. Brands are starting to figure it out, whether it's an exciting pop up or creating an interactive technology experience or collaborations, or a way to personalize something or customize your product that you just can't do over the phone or on your computer, and all that fun stuff brings folks in. And Jill, I agree, let's not forget about the immediacy of bringing it home. That's certainly a value add. There's no question.

**Jill Standish [00:07:36]** You know, I think to add to the more human side here that Jaryn, you're talking about, there is a real balance now between brands that are looking at their digital experience and their physical experience and making sure that they're making money. And so this balance around profit and profitability is so important. And I've been watching how some of these digital only brands are starting to open physical stores. And the reason they're doing it is pretty simple. I mean, one is the halo effect when you put a store in a catchment area. It absolutely boosts sales and it boosts profit because the consumer knows that the brand is there. There's legitimacy in the brand. It also lowers customer acquisition costs. So your point on, you know, driving by and seeing, you know, a store, a physical store on your way to work or on your way to dinner legitimizes the brand. It helps with search results. It helps with popularity. Maybe mentions on Instagram. I mean, you name it, there's a reason why physical stores are boosting profits. Not not just to mention the other things you were talking about, which is returns. And maybe, you know, taking away the shipping aspect, which is another added cost. But it's good for business, and I think that's also an element that everyone needs to talk about is why it's good to have a physical presence.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:09:01]** Jill, you mentioned that you said the the stories that fit that physical representation of the brand or something like that is that the social? I think we talked about this as well. Like that there's an emotional engagement when you're in the store, right, is that you don't get perhaps online. It's a different experience. Yet the brand has to be the same, whether it's on, you know, in the in the physical store or online, right? You have to have those same kind of brand attributes at work.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:09:29]** Yeah, I think actually, Arthur, that you're speaking to the physical connection, that emotional connection to to a brand and you know, a store gives a brand context. It's three dimensional. So, you know, you could feel the energy and you feel the people around you. And that's kind of a good thing, especially considering what we just came out of the last 18 months, you know, shopping in a store. It's just it's fun and it's an experience and it's a social experience. And aren't we dying to have social experiences now if I am right being in isolation for so long? So, yeah, and I think that people feed on people and people feed on energy and energy is infectious and all that positive energy breeds great results for us merchants as well. But I do believe that there's an emotional connection with the brands when you when you experience a brand in a physical environment. I really, truly believe that.

**Jill Standish [00:10:25]** Yeah, I think, you know, you're bringing up some wonderful points around. I think we're wired to need some personal guidance and some personal reassurance. I mean, I don't know about your chairman, but like trying on skinny jeans is just like horrific sometimes, you know. But if someone says, Hey, you look really awesome in those skinny jeans, you're going to say, Wow, maybe I do.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:10:48]** So it's interesting because, you know, listen, we all shop online also. And I I just I don't want to have to go through. I really don't want to have to go through 75 styles to figure out what, what gene I want to buy if I'm looking for a gene, for example. So, you know, in my mind, listen, I narrowed down

the assortment selection. I try to pre shop and look at all the brands that I think are, you know, intrinsic to me or my fashion style. I probably narrow it down to, let's say, two or three. And then what I do is I walk into a store and I am met with an associate that that I can connect to because the truth is I'm not 18. And if there's an 18 year old that walks over to me, it's not necessarily going to mean the same as if it's somebody that I can kind of relate to. And I like the idea of being able to ask somebody this my a little too old for that or is this cool enough? Or, you know, is this rise a little too low? And you know, and there is and I met with an associate that that actually, you know, understands the product and understands the customers and can connect the two in a way that kind of creates trust. And I definitely have my sales associates that I go to to certain stores. I do rely on that level of expertise that you speak of or that level of personal attention. And you know, I want somebody to say, you know what? That size isn't right, because by the way, how many times have you bought a pair of jeans if we're talking about jeans but really mean anything and you're not really sure which size? So you know, you buy one size and then you're thinking. Would it have been the size smaller that would have looked a little bit better? Would it? Maybe that's a little too tight and then you're going to go through the hassle of returning and getting the next size? I don't know. I feel like there's such a great value in being able to narrow down the assortment and then and then use that physical space with that associate that hopefully is knowledgeable about the brand and the and the product and and help you make the right decision for you and your and your and what looks good on your personally. Does that resonate

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:13:00]** that, you know, I was thinking about my own experience, you know, taking, you know, going shopping over the years and and I just I want to assume maybe it's a gender thing, but as a man, I want to go in and out. But but you're totally right. I think that experience that human interaction. I didn't realize how valuable that was until we were until you couldn't go into a store. And I remember walking by it was up here in the in the Hudson Valley where I live. There was, you know, kind of a shopping center and there were some brands and, you know, home goods, I think was there and then Marshalls. And there was peering in

the window and there was it was like they had just walked away. They shut the doors and it was like, I think winter merchandise and it was all collecting dust and it was the saddest thing. And you know, and then when stores reopen, then you could go back. I was like, You have a new appreciation not only just for the interacting with the products, but you're right, that human connection. I don't realize like how important that is that. You know, versus online, it's more like transactional. So if I order something online, you know, I'm going to get it and it's transaction where the human connection plays such a significant role in it in a physical store. And it's a sales associate right there, the front lines of that of the brand. They are the brand incarnate, right?

**Jaryn Bloom [00:14:20]** Just yesterday, actually, I had a meeting with this wonderful executive that's on my team, and she's actually a data scientist and we're going over all this customer data, which is so interesting. I love to sink my teeth into that. And she had on this fantastic outfit. And so I said to her, Wow, that then outfit looks great, you know, did you did you order that online? And she said, And she looked at me and she said, Are you kidding me? I don't know how to put myself together like this. I don't. It's not my core competency actually digging into all the data and analytics. And she said, I need help. I love when it associates. I go to Mary, who's my Fanta, my favorite associate, and she really does right by me. And you know, she puts me in the fitting room and shows me how to style. So, you know, if I walk in to a store, if I walk into the store needing a blazer and all of a sudden she puts me in the fitting room and she's showing me, by the way, not only about that blazer that I thought I wanted when I pre shopped online, but how to wear it belted and wear it with a pair of jeans or a trouser. And by the way, I can wear a sneaker now with the trouser or I wear a pump. And by the way, I could take that blazer off and I can actually now put my motorcycle jacket on so I can look a little hip for my daughter so that she thinks I'm relevant and so forth and so on. It was so exciting to me because here's somebody who you know, she she, you know, doesn't have that that intrinsic sense of style, but wants to look great and feel confident and relies on that physical store environment and sales associates in order to create that outcome for





her. And she looked gorgeous. And I don't know it. Just it jazzed me yesterday. I thought I would. I thought that was actually an interesting thing to bring up today.

**Arthur Zaczkiewicz [00:16:07]** Julie is that the future of retail? I think we also talked about like, I think the future retail is sort of locked into its past. Right. So like going back, you know, I mean, technology is great and the data like Jarrett mentioned is needed. But is that what is the future of retail?

**Jill Standish [00:16:25]** Well, first of all, there's some really interesting points that we're bringing up here, which is, you know, connecting the relationships that you can build your brand with the consumer. And I think there's there's a couple of things. One is. First of all, using technology in new ways. I mean, you brought up Jared. This whole idea of customer analytics will really each brand needs to figure out how to go, understand what is going on in the local community. Whether you call it a catchment area or a city or a market, it doesn't matter. But what is the economics? What is what is the what is resonating in that local market? And that technology can help you do that, which is one thing. The other thing that you brought up was really around authenticity and the fact that there's a person that you met in your office and she was she was going to a store and having this relationship with someone in the store could help her style. I'm seeing that happen through digital channels as well through things like live streaming. But the live streaming that I'm watching is not necessarily through an influencer. It's through someone in the store that just has a phone and maybe a light ring and says, You know these shoes, everyone let me show you these shoes and she holds them up and she puts them in her hand. And she says, these shoes are really amazing. They're soft, they're comfortable, and this person can be just a store associate. And that that is to me, live streaming. And it's really brand ambassadorship. It's and that live streaming I'm finding on websites today. I'm not just finding it on Instagram, though. So connecting with people, whether it be in-person in a store or having that store amplify a message through uploading a video, who cares? The fact is, is that we're finding different ways to connect with one another in really authentic ways. And that, to me,

is just, you know, the future is you don't have to necessarily be in a store to get that same authenticity if you're looking at someone showing you through a video. But certainly connections need to be authentic and connecting with the brand.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:18:35]** I absolutely agree. Actually utilizing our brand app and our loyalty programs in-store as well creates exciting opportunities like buy, online pickup and pick in store. We also encourage our clients to book personal style appointments, and that can be done through these lines streaming, whether it's personal or through the the the content that that we send to the store and. And actually, recently, the technology that we use in stores enables associates to present a broader range of products to the guests, and we can now send a link so that we can now track back to that associate to further ensure that their relationship between client and brand continues past that store visit. Right. Because today, all channels blend.

**Jill Standish [00:19:25]** And you know, you brought up something around the word convenience and I'm struck by everyone thought that E! Commerce was the most convenient, which in fact, in some categories, it really is. But in in other categories like we're talking about fashion here with you, Eugene, you know, convenience going to a store is probably even more convenient if you have, like you said, such a fantastic brand ambassador, a store associate who knows how to style, and she gets to know who I am and knows what looks good on me, man, she could be pulling some things, getting the dressing room set up. She could be emailing me a lookbook. She could be talking to me through different channels. So talk about convenience, you know, then I can decide how I want to interact with this person. But yeah, that is shortening my time. It's giving me a direct stylus that can work with me. That, to me, is convenient.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:20:17]** No, no, I absolutely agree with that. And then if if Jill, if you're visiting a store that's not near your home, for example, I can then ship it directly to you. I can messenger it to your hotel. I can hand you a beautiful bag as you walk out the door. So there's absolutely a convenience element as it



pertains to shopping in stores, and it's fun. Let's not forget about that. It's fun, right? Shopping is fun. I know we need it so badly. Why don't you

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:20:49]** remind me how many? How many stores do you guys have?

**Jaryn Bloom [00:20:51]** Oh goodness. We have eight. Have over 800 stores worldwide. OK. All over the globe.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:20:58]** All over. Oh all right. So if I get stuck somewhere and I need something messengered

**Jaryn Bloom [00:21:02]** now, it's interesting because you know, some of these, some of these, some of these new technologies enable you to really client clientele with consumers that you do get to know. Joe, I love what you said about when you walk into a store and the associate tries to get to know you and understand you because at the end of the day, they're not just selling. You know, we used to say point of sale in the old days, and now I see a point of service because they're really servicing you at the end of the day. So getting to know you and understanding your lifestyle and how and your comfort zone and and the truth is, if I could push you a little bit out of your comfort zone, but it ends up being your favorite outfit and your go to will, then you know, there unlocks that value of that interaction with a sales associate in a light store. If ultimately, if my associates can make you feel like you're in the fitting room with Michael Kors himself, well, I'm sorry, but no filter robot can have that same outcome.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:22:00]** I love it

**Jill Standish [00:22:00]** that. Yeah. And you know, there's I always say that there's only so many things you can do online. I don't know about you, but I can't, you know, have the same level of comfort trying on things. I can't get my eyebrows waxed online. I can't. I can't enjoy your fantastic cup of coffee with you, right?

**Jaryn Bloom [00:22:20]** Or a pedicure.

**Jill Standish [00:22:21]** Or a pedicure? Yeah, exactly.

**Jaryn Bloom [00:22:23]** So I don't know why that came to mind, but

**Jill Standish [00:22:26]** I think it's definitely things we all

**Jaryn Bloom [00:22:28]** need. Know it's ways that we connect. I mean, it really is. It's socializing, you know, it's socializing. You know, there's there's. There's just so many things that you can do that, you know, provide the same level of satisfaction. Shopping is fun and we need to continue to make it fun because one, if you make it fun, customers will understand that value and they'll come back.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:22:52]** Speaking of shopping, I was looking for a present for my daughter, who's 16 and very particular and smart about what she wants and what she wears. And I noticed that Michael Kors offers a Jahren watch. What's what's the story there?

**Jaryn Bloom [00:23:09]** The Jahren watch? Is that what you're asking about? So, so I've been with Michael for 15 years, and it must have been over 10 years ago when Michael designed this fantastic oversize gold what we called a runway watch. He actually it's an oversize watch that look like a men's watch, but it was for women. And he put it down the runway and no pun intended, but it took off. It became the watch it became. You know, we launched it in gold and then we iterated it, then in silver and then rose gold, and then with glitz and then acrylic and then acrylic and glitz. And you know, these watches became a collector's item. And one day said to Michael, I don't understand. We've never put this. We've never we've never iterated this on a leather band. Let's do it to broaden the range. And he said, You know, that's a great idea. So we took that big oversize dial and we put it on a leather band and he named it the Jahren watch. And by the way, of course, it was a bestseller then. And and it still is now amazing. So it's funny that you bring that up.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:24:15]** That's a great story. Before we wrap up, Jill have just a question for you that sort of, you know, as we go through these themes and ideas, you know, the series that we're working on, it's about retailers responsible, we said. So what do you personally do when you're in need of a reset?

**Jill Standish [00:24:32]** Hmm. The great question for me, my biggest reset is, well, first of



all, I go to dinner every Friday night with my husband because it after a long week. I just don't want to cook. And I think we all cooked a lot when we were in lockdown. And so Friday night is my and my week. Go out to dinner and just a simple little trick, I get to pick one week. Then he gets to pick and then I get to pick, and then he gets to pick. So my Friday night dinner is something that I savor and it it does reset me for the weekend.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:25:05]** Nice. It's generally the only thing that you do on the how do you get ready?

**Jaryn Bloom [00:25:09]** Actually, I was listening to Jill and I was thinking for me, the we get the Friday night dinner is actually not going to a restaurant because I'm working around the clock. It feels like so there is no time in my life to cook. So we're I'm going out with my husband every single night during the week for dinner. So resetting to me is actually opening of a bottle of wine, ordering in some Chinese food and maybe having a chance to watch something fabulous on Netflix. That, to me, is my reset.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:25:40]** Well, thank you to. This is a great conversation, I think. Yeah, it's just an amazing transformation that we're going through as an industry. And again, you know, physical retail, I think, is key. I think that's the point of this. Any closing thoughts from either of you?

**Jaryn Bloom [00:25:56]** I would just say that, you know, we spent a lot of time chatting about the physical experience and the associates involvement in that and how they are so important to drive the right outcomes and to drive the relationship between consumer and brand. And it extends way beyond the store with all the modern technology that we all have at our fingertips. I think it's important to understand that. Shopping is not going away and physical stores are not dead, and it's having that right level of convenience and fun across the entire ecosystem that really drives the full 360 experience. I think it's super important to realize that and and and really, that's what I would like to leave you with that. It's it's about the whole ecosystem and stores are a critical part of that.

**Jill Standish [00:26:48]** I guess for me, Arthur, the theme here is that people matter and store

associates. When we went through the pandemic, we heard the word frontline worker and frontline worker, of course, dealt with, obviously in the medical fields, etc. But I consider store associates really on the frontline and because they're dealing with the public, they're dealing with the community. And you know, you can have the best assortment, you can have the best brand. You can have the best signage, the right price, the best marketing campaign. And boy, if you walk into a store and the store associate is in a bad mood, you can break the whole thing.

**Arthur Zaczekiewicz [00:27:27]** Thank you so much. And thank you listeners for tuning in. We'll have more episodes and more insights on the way next week. Thank you.

**[00:27:36]** Ready Reset. Grow Accenture helps retailers around the globe embrace change to seize the future. Learn about the five imperatives of retailers responsible reset and how leading retailers are partnering with Accenture at [Accenture.com/Retail](https://www.accenture.com/Retail)

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