For 10th Small Business Saturday, American Express Opens AR Experience in Retail Tech

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Small Business Saturday is celebrating a decade in existence with the evolution in retail tech.

American Express will open a consumer experience in New York City that uses technology to show what the future of retail could look like over the next 10 years. Ahead of the financial service firm’s 10th anniversary on Nov. 30, the brand conducted a survey of 1,000 nationally representative U.S. adults and found that 77% of Americans observe the holiday as a national tradition. The campaign to drive more customers to local businesses has grown into an important post-Black Friday event for independent retailers across the country.

The experience and overall campaign also aim to shed light on issues small businesses face today. According to the Shop Small Consumer Impact survey conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of American Express in October, 73% of people feel that empty storefronts are a national issue. Also, 84% say that the increase in empty storefronts and closing of independently owned businesses negatively affects their local community.

The experience includes an AR wine shop where attendees can see labels come to life.
Getty Images for American Express
The Big Future of Shopping Small pop-up will open to the public Nov. 23-24, 30 and Dec. 1 as an interactive retail experience with shoppable product displays and storefront vignettes incorporating augmented reality and artificial intelligence. The brand tapped experiential agency Momentum Worldwide to produce the experience and work with the businesses to incorporate tech some of them currently use into the stations.

“We are passionate about helping small business owners thrive in today’s rapidly evolving retail climate. However, we know that the current state of retail—from rising rents to the

changing consumer shopping habits—has caused us to thoughtfully consider how we best support this community," said Walter Frye, vice president of global brand engagement for American Express, noting the experience showcases a few innovative methods that small businesses could use to "adapt to keep pace with larger retailers and shopper demand."

American Express brought in independent retailers for each station, which include QR codes for all participating businesses: Glazed and Confused doughnut shop will use AI to read an attendee's biometrics, to match them with s'mores, funfetti or apple pie flavors and serve it to them. The pop-up also includes a station with augmented reality wine labels to demonstrate how AR product labels can convey a brand's story through video, text or a link to that brand's website. Onsite brand ambassadors can show attendees how to activate the AR labels on bottles from brands like Beringer Brothers. Another AR shop displays products from brands like Parley for the Oceans, to show attendees how multiple businesses can use the tech to share a single shelf, demonstrating efficiency for those brands to be in more locations.

The pop-up also includes a shop that features clothes made from upcycled materials by Zero Waste Daniel.
Getty Images for American Express
Shoppable displays include an area that features clothes made with upcycled materials by eco-friendly designer Zero Waste Daniel, and a shop from New Stand, a register-free boutique convenience store with curated items that are only available to purchase through the company’s app.

The tech and sustainability stations in the experience are also inspired by insights from American Express’ collaboration with consumer trend forecasting company WGSN. The brand worked with WGSN to create the online Future of Shopping Small Guide, which offers tips for small business owners on how to “future-proof” their businesses. Advice includes keeping an eye on

platforms that help small businesses accept contactless and mobile payments through Wi-Fi-enabled networks.

American Express invited local business owners, media and celebrities including American Express ambassador Karlie Kloss to preview the experience on Thursday, with an event that included a fireside chat with Lin-Manuel Miranda, who returns as the ambassador for the Small Business Saturday campaign. Miranda stars in a refreshed version of the brand's 2018 TV spot, which depicts the Hamilton creator stopping at businesses in his neighborhood of Washington Heights.

The Big Future of Shopping Small isn't the only experiential effort tied to Small Business Saturday. On Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, the brand will bring its chef-driven and shopping-related Platinum House—its traveling activation for Platinum and Centurion cardmembers—to New York for the first time.

And as part of the 10th anniversary, American Express is partnering with Main Street America—a nonprofit that aims to revitalize historic commercial districts—to give 10 small business owners a $10,000 grant each to help their companies grow. American Express also worked with Main Street America during last year's Small Business Saturday campaign to commit $2 million in grants to historic sites.

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