

Fresh Advice for Retailers from Trend Forecasting Firm TOBE

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6/20/2017

[Leslie Ghize](#) has some fresh advice for retailers. She's executive vice president at [The TOBE Report](#), a think tank owned by [The Doneger Group](#) that has been tracking and interpreting trends in fashion, culture, and retail and advising leading retailers for 90 years. I first saw Leslie speak at the [7th Annual Executive Forum](#) by [RetailNext](#), the retail vertical IoT integrated platform, where she delivered a presentation called "Early Birding" chock-full of trends and insights. In a follow-up interview, she expounded on some of her advice for retailers.

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(Credit: The TOBE Group)

The prescription for branding has changed, says Leslie Ghize of The TOBE Group.

"Go on tour." Retailers should adopt a road show strategy in which they build out a calendar of experiences and put them in front of consumers. For examples Leslie points to the Nike Store in New York's SOHO district which uses technology to regularly change its store design and offerings, and 14th Factory, a pop-up art exhibition space in Los Angeles's Lincoln Heights neighborhood that stages each room as a distinct experience. She encourages

retailers to show different facets of their personality, moving from the old school approach that emphasized consistency and a blueprint of aesthetic, to becoming more original and confident in presenting the different facets of their brand.

"Less storytelling, more story-doing." Storytelling, Leslie says, sounds fake, "like you're making it up." Although the craft of telling the story of a brand should endure, she believes the language and stance of storytelling are "outmoded." She advocates replacing the term, which refers to recounting what happened in the past, with the notion of "narrative." The difference is more than semantics -- it represents a change in stance. Narrative suggests that retailers are expressing themselves in forward-moving, real, and active experiences.

"Ask dumb questions." Retailers, especially department stores, need to change their point of view of their business -- and one of the ways Leslie advises doing this is to question everything. Retailers should be asking themselves if they need to produce so much product, if they should be presenting these categories, if they should continue to have a Juniors department when no one calls themselves a "junior." Retailers can start something completely fresh if they take a no-holds-barred approach and realize there are no rules now. You don't have to have a website, or you could have four websites, she muses. Ask simple questions to be sure you are making decisions most suited to your audience and not forgetting the pure purpose of what you're doing.

The prescription for branding has changed, Leslie concludes. Try something fresh, different, new. With business moving ever faster and the consumer even more swiftly, retailers need to pick up the pace and "get more comfortable being uncomfortable."

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