



Gone tomorrow: The spread of pop-up retailing

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A surprising shopping experience is becoming mainstream.

“Now you see it, now you don’t” could be the slogan for American retailing these days. Even some of the most mainstream brands, like Circuit City and Linens ’n Things, have shut their doors. But a trend called pop-up stores makes sudden disappearance part of the appeal. Pop-ups arrive unannounced in empty storefronts or public spaces and leave just as quickly. Their aim, says Eduardo Braniff of Imagination USA, which does “experiential” marketing, is to “intervene in a consumer’s life” and take people by surprise.

Given that eliciting shock is a prime goal of pop-ups, the more unpredictable the location, the better. Target, a national retailer, launched a pop-up “bazaar” in May in an abandoned museum, selling cheap items from its spring and summer collections. It lasted only three days. Boats, crates, buses and churches have been used for pop-ups too.

The cost of pop-ups varies between \$100,000 and \$600,000 a month, according to Melissa Spiegelman of Destination Media Group. For companies looking to make a splash, it can be money well spent. Pop-ups tend to attract media attention as well as consumers—sometimes more than a television commercial or full-page newspaper advert could.

Although pop-ups have been used as a marketing tool for more than five years, the weak property market makes them even more popular. Daffy’s, a discount retailer not usually known for its choice zip code, opened a pop-up in Manhattan’s chic West Village this week on the ground floor of an apartment building that had been tenantless. Hermes, Gucci and Brooks Brothers, all luxury retailers, have opened temporary shops in East Hampton this summer. Their leases are only a few months long, just enough to ride out the peak season.

Jack Anderson, of Hornall Anderson, a branding agency, hopes that pop-ups will revive the home of American consumerism: the mall. General Growth Properties, the second-largest American mall company, filed for bankruptcy this year, and other malls are struggling to survive. Hornall Anderson has been hired by the Westfield Group, which owns 119 shopping centers around the world, to find a way to win back brands and customers. The firm plans to use pop-ups to make shopping an unpredictable experience every month. The mall, it is hoped, will not disappear as quickly as most pop-ups do.