



World Retail Awards recognises leading retailers for their role in tackling the pandemic

Alibaba Group, Walgreens, El Corte Inglés, SM Supermalls, Ikea, Arçelik and Carrefour Brasil named as winners across the seven special categories.

September 29, 2021

After nearly two years of unprecedented change brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Retail Awards were completely refocused for 2021 to reflect the extraordinary work by retailers around the world in supporting their customers, their employees and their communities whilst shaking-up their own business models in order to survive.

The category shortlists were selected by panels of retail industry experts and the winners by the Grand Jury which was made up of highly experienced senior retailers from around the world and across all sectors and channels.

Members of the Grand Jury gave their comments on this year's special World Retail Awards. "In the midst of challenging times brought on by the pandemic, the retail industry accelerated innovation in ways that it never has before. This included service to customers as well as taking care of employees to protect and support them. We know that crises can ignite creativity, and the needs of our customers and the front line associates who serve them became a shared priority like never before."

Arlette Guthrie, SVP Human Resources, Home Depot

"Following the extraordinary times we've been through, the World Retail Awards provide us with a great opportunity to recognise some of the amazing innovations and initiatives the retail sector has delivered."

Kate Walsh, SVP, Omnichannel Retail, Pandora

"This year's awards reflect the acceleration of omnichannel, the need for speed and innovation and represent the ability to acknowledge those businesses and individuals who stood tall during the difficult times."

Bernie Brookes, Chairman, Agriculture Innovation Australia

The Chairman of the World Retail Congress and Awards, Ian McGarrigle said: “From the very beginning of the pandemic, the retail industry right around the world demonstrated how critical it is in meeting the needs of its customers and communities. We felt strongly that we wanted to put a spotlight on the incredible commitment shown by retailers and the millions of people employed in the industry with these special awards. The truly global list of winners and shortlisted finalists reinforces exactly that and I wish to extend my congratulations to them all”.

The Categories and Winners:

The Community Champion Award

When countries were forced to lock down around the world, millions of people faced isolation in their homes. Essential retailers in particular found themselves in the frontline to support not just their customers, but their communities. This special award put a much deserved spotlight on the way retail companies went far beyond their day-to-day aim of selling goods to customers, highlighting their purpose and values.

Winner: El Corte Inglés

With a standout, integrated response across every dimension of the pandemic that included creating a hospital, El Corte Inglés overcame all the expectations for a genuinely conscious corporation. Our judges said it could be considered as the citizen corporation of the year and demonstrated what is perhaps a unique case of a real healthcare retail transformation.

Highly commended: Made.com

Customer Experience Breakthrough Award

When essential retailers suddenly had to rethink their operations to serve a massive increase in customer demand, while remaining safe and secure, they developed many new services including click & collect, kerbside pick-up and self-scanning. Non-essential retailers also developed new services to meet customer needs, even though their stores remained closed. This award recognises not just customer experience innovations but also the way they were developed and implemented so quickly.

Winner: #AweSMLearning Campaign, SM Supermalls, Philippines

For work that the judges said went beyond core competence to solve customer pain points and to build emotional connections, clearly meeting the challenges brought on by COVID. Described as amazing, with business results that are “whopping” for a very difficult project, SM Supermalls was praised for narrowing down on a key demographic of parents and school-age children and building a unique experience during COVID.

Best Retail Innovation

Throughout the duration of this pandemic, the consistent theme across the global retail industry is it's incredible level of innovation. When faced with the challenges brought about by COVID, retail leadership teams developed and implemented some outstanding new initiatives and innovations designed to help their businesses meet the needs of their customers.

Winner: Taobao Live Livestreaming – Alibaba Group

In awarding this, our judges said that Alibaba has revolutionised live streaming, made it mainstream, generated huge revenues and commissions for sales people when stores were closed, and created a new sales channel. They described it as the future of interactive, entertaining commerce and said that the way Alibaba has incorporated livestreaming across its entire ecosystem is truly innovative, cutting across categories and range and achieving phenomenal viewing numbers.

Highly commended: Connected Retail by Zalando – Zalando

Omnichannel Transformation Award

This award recognises the work undertaken by retailers to radically change their existing business models, many of whom had to base this around a portfolio of stores and integrate them with their online channels. How they put this in place was one of the biggest strategic challenges for retailing.

Winner: Arçelik

In another keenly fought category, the judges said that our winner had gone through a complete digital transformation, with impressive results and evidence, impressive personalisation and optimisation of the route network, clearly led from above by the CEO.

Last Mile Delivery

With ecommerce sales reaching levels not expected for another five years and millions of people demanding ever faster delivery, there has been real pressure for retailers to complete speedy, efficient and reliable last mile delivery. Many of the innovative delivery solutions created have been born out of the unique conditions in different countries.

Winner: Walgreens

The judges called Walgreens a standout example of how a retailer can respond to changing consumer demand to offer flexible, convenient and speedy last mile service to shoppers. This represents what the best omni-channel retailers have been doing in terms of last mile.

Accelerating Diversity in Retail

Over the course of the pandemic, retail leadership teams realised that they had to be the best possible employers in order to protect and support their workforces, while implementing dramatic change. But more than that, retail was very much in the frontline in the campaign for social justice which swept around the world from the US in 2020. Diversity, equality and inclusion had been an important focus for retailers and this award recognises those that moved fast to accelerate and celebrate diversity throughout the organisation.

Winner: Carrefour Brasil Group

The judges said that the Brazilian arm has aligned strongly with the global agenda for Carrefour Group, which currently employs over 178,000 women, which in itself is a huge global impact. While the Group's goal is to hire 40% women, in Brazil they already have 48% women employed and almost 38% in leadership roles. Carrefour Brasil Group has shown a great commitment to focus on the broad diversity and inclusion agenda, from an internal and external perspective, through engagement with different stakeholders.

Highly Commended: Dixons Carphone

Building A Sustainable Future Award

The number one issue for many retailers before the pandemic struck was the need to tackle environmental and climate change. It is not just consumer pressure, but governments and investors who are demanding action. Retailers themselves are looking to lead the way and the UN's COP26 conference in November is acting as a vital focal point. This award is designed to recognise the initiatives that retailers have implemented since the beginning of 2020 to deliver tangible results in sustainability.

Winner: IKEA

The judges were impressed by the sheer scale of IKEA in Sweden and globally, which makes its impact very important. They have approached sustainability with a global perspective and IKEA Sweden has translated the same approach for its region, looking at every aspect that is important to its business and the environment. The judges said: "What is remarkable is how IKEA approaches sustainability as a business opportunity and everything it does is a natural extension of their vision and values. Given the large size and global spread of the company, every step taken is a global win towards a sustainable future."

The Grand Jury

Juliet Anammah, Chair, Jumia
Jessica Anuna, Founder & CEO, Klasha
Bernie Brookes, Chairman, Agriculture Innovation Australia
Sarah Davis, Former CEO, Loblaws
Arlette Guthrie, SVP Human Resources, Home Depot
Renuka Jagtiani, Chair, Landmark
Andrew Jennings, NED, Ted Baker
Bijou Kurien, Chairman, RAI
Caito Maia, Founder and CEO, Chilli Beans
Jaume Miquel, Chairman and CEO, Tendam
Neela Montgomery, CEO, CVS Pharmacy
Olga Naumova, CEO, Vostochny Souz
Kate Walsh, SVP, Omnichannel Retail, Pandora
Tea Colaianni, Founder and Chair, Diversity in Retail

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