

WINNING THE LAST MILE IN-STORE

A RETAIL LEADER'S GUIDE TO FLOORING FOR EXPERIENCE, SAFETY, AND SALES

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The Last Mile of Retail Happens Underfoot

The most expensive part of your retail customer experience may be happening underfoot, and you might be losing sales because of it. In the first 10 seconds after stepping inside, shoppers decide whether they'll linger or leave. If your flooring undermines comfort, safety, or brand perception, you've lost the sale before it's begun.

For years, retailers have invested heavily in digital. Mobile apps, AI-driven personalization, one-click checkout — all designed to make online shopping seamless. But for most customers, the real test of a brand happens not on a screen, but when they walk through your doors.

In that moment, the store floor becomes the last mile of your brand experience. It's where aesthetic promise meets physical reality. Is the space clean? Does it feel safe? Is it easy and enjoyable to navigate? The answers to these questions often start underfoot.

Flooring is one of the most overlooked yet influential elements of retail success. It shapes first impressions, directs traffic, reinforces brand identity, impacts perceptions of quality, and even affects how long customers stay.

"When a shopper walks through a retailer's entrance, they aren't just walking into a building, they're stepping through a brand portal. As they orient themselves to the space, flooring plays a critical role in quite literally setting the stage onto which they're stepping."

- Paul Wolski,
SVP, Creative | Miller Zell

> **If we're thinking about flooring in the age of smartphones, we need to remember that a lot of shoppers are looking down at their device, oriented toward the ground, so there's an opportunity to intercept them there.**
>
> ***- Paul Wolski***



Why Flooring and Matting Matter More Than Ever

Over the past decade, brick-and-mortar retail has been reinvented. Stores aren't just places to transact — they're experiential destinations. Nike's House of Innovation lets customers test products in immersive sports environments. Dick's Sporting Goods' House of Sport turns stores into athletic playgrounds. Target's remodel program blends online convenience with in-store engagement.

But while the industry focuses on flashy features and high-tech integration, foundational elements like flooring and matting have quietly proven to be powerful drivers of performance in sync with the changing nature of the market and of shopper expectations.

Rising expectations: Research from the International Council of Shopping Centers shows that **97% of all Gen Z shoppers still visit brick-and-mortar stores**. But they aren't satisfied with ordinary retail spaces, Colliers' Gen Z Consumer Pulse survey found that 77% of Gen Z respondents prioritize bright, clean, and well-organized environments. Mintel's retail insights add that Gen Z expects retailers to align with their values—especially around diversity, inclusion, and sustainability, while a separate MIT Sloan study notes that consumers "yearn for a cohesive experience," meaning the in-store journey should be just as seamless and engaging as the online one.

Visible values: According to the Wunderman Thompson Future Shopper Report 2022, **60% of global consumers say they actively choose retailers and brands that are environmentally friendly.** This underscores the need for stores to make their sustainability practices visible from the entrance onward.

Better experiences breeds loyalty: Customers linger longer and spend more in stores they perceive as clean, safe, and comfortable. According to Proctor & Gamble's research, **92% of shoppers say cleanliness, including floor appearance, directly affects their decision to be a repeat customer.**

Changing habits: Eye-tracking research confirms that smartphone use shifts gaze significantly downward. **Texting while walking, for instance, increases ground-focused gaze by nearly 40% compared to normal walking**. At the same time, surveys show that 77% of shoppers use their mobile devices in-store, often to compare prices or read reviews. This combination of posture and behavior means that retailers now have a greater opportunity and responsibility to treat flooring and matting as part of the visible brand experience. Whether through cleanliness, sustainable materials, or floor-level branding, what's underfoot is more likely than ever to be in a customer's line of sight.

ROI is measurable: Industry research and actual experience demonstrate that floor graphics including logo matting can deliver significant sales improvements, with documented **increases ranging from 17% to as high as 91% in exceptional circumstances**.

Operational value: **Entrance matting can trap up to 80% of dirt and moisture**, reducing cleaning costs, extending flooring lifespan, and lowering slip-and-fall risks.



> Flooring is one of the really important design decisions from the very beginning as you shape how customers will start to experience a space. If it is too busy, it can compete with the merchandise and overwhelms the shopper. At the same time, the right flooring can create a sense of warmth and welcome for customers.
>
> ***- Lara Marrero***
> ***Strategy Director and Retail Leader | Gensler***

Floors as the Overlooked Experience Maker

From the first step inside, flooring and matting set the tone. The material, texture, and color palette create the visual baseline for the entire store. It's not just décor — it's a silent brand ambassador making the first on-site impression. It also serves a design and wayfinding role for customers.

The retail customer experience operates on two levels: what shoppers feel internally and what they encounter through their senses. Flooring sits at the intersection of both. According to Marrero, properly chosen flooring and matting can help provide shoppers with a "good visual and sensorial indicator of change in destination or flow when they step on something different or something that is used in a different way. It gives them that 'aha' moment."

Flooring and matting are tools for increasing comfort, navigation, and brand impact.

Comfort keeps shoppers on the floor longer. Cushioned areas in fitting rooms or lounge zones encourage dwell time.

Navigation improves through material or color changes that define departments and draw shoppers toward featured displays. Flooring can play this role as well as literally provide wayfinding guidance to shoppers.

Brand reinforcement happens with logo mats, on-brand color accents, or thematic finishes that tell the store's story.



> Done well, customers almost may not consciously notice retail flooring, at first. As they spend more time in the store, they start to register how well the brand pays attention to the details. It's an ambient impact.

- Mat Gurda
Senior Creative Director | WD Partners

> **We can't design a floor plan that only accounts for product. We have to design for human flow, not just the merchandise.**
>
> ***- Lara Marrero***

The tendency to view flooring as an afterthought in retail design overlooks a critical opportunity to enhance both customer experience and employee wellness. Rather than treating flooring as a commodity or relegating flooring to the "finishes" category alongside paint and basic materials, progressive retailers and leading retail designers are recognizing its strategic role in human-centered design. This human-centered approach means designing flooring and matting for the places people actually spend time: cushioned surfaces where employees stand all day, slip-resistant areas where staff move merchandise, and welcoming textures where customers make purchasing decisions.





Safe and Clean: The Unspoken Brand Promise

Safety is the foundation of trust. Shoppers may never consciously thank you for a slip-free surface, but they will remember the store where they, or someone in their family, took a tumble. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission attributes over 2 million fall injuries each year directly to floors and flooring materials.

Slip-resistant flooring surfaces, well-maintained finishes, and strategically placed matting are simple, high-impact defenses. Entrance systems that trap up to 80% of dirt and moisture from customer traffic help keep main floors dry and stable. In high-risk areas—like produce sections, restrooms, and vestibules—textured or treated materials improve cleanliness and traction without sacrificing aesthetics.

When it comes to the silent communicator—cleanliness—customers notice clean floors often more than they notice the latest high-tech feature. ServiceChannel's State of Brick & Mortar survey found that 64% of shoppers have left a store because of poor appearance, with dirty floors cited among the most visible issues.

Durable flooring and modular flooring systems extend that clean, cared-for look. By resisting wear, capturing debris at entry, and allowing for quick replacement of damaged sections, these solutions keep the space looking new longer and reduce maintenance costs over the flooring's life cycle.



Flooring as a Values Statement

Your floors can speak for your brand before a single associate does. In an era where loyalty can hinge on environmental responsibility, your entryway is a powerful stage for sustainability.

Sustainable materials, responsibly sourced manufacturing, and visible recycling practices can transform an entryway from a simple transition space into a brand touchpoint that says, “We care about the planet.”

MatWorks’ REPP-Tile™ line is designed for retailers who want to make that message tangible. Made from recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PET), REPP-Tile is a high-performance entryway flooring solution that can be fully recycled at the end of its lifespan, typically around five years, into new REPP-Tile products. This closed-loop lifecycle means nothing ends up in a landfill, aligning with circular economy principles and many retailers’ ESG goals.

The environmental benefits don’t come at the expense of performance. REPP-Tile withstands heavy traffic, resists stains, and captures dirt and moisture at the door, reducing cleaning needs and protecting downstream flooring. Its modular design also allows for quick spot replacement, minimizing waste and labor costs.

By choosing sustainable flooring and matting solutions like REPP-Tile, retailers can:

- Reduce their environmental footprint
- Comply with emerging carpet recycling regulations in states like California and New York
- Engage eco-conscious customers from their first step inside
- Reinforce brand reputation as an environmentally responsible leader



Happy Associates = Better Customer Experiences

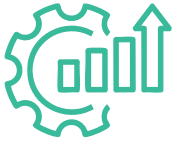
Great customer experiences start with the people delivering them. When associates are comfortable, they're more energetic, engaged, and helpful—and flooring plays a big role in making that happen.

Hard, unforgiving surfaces can lead to fatigue, joint pain, and musculoskeletal issues. Anti-fatigue mats, strategically placed at checkouts, service counters, and high-use back-of-house areas, reduce strain and improve posture.

Anti-fatigue matting provides crucial support for retail employees who spend long hours on their feet:



Reduced absenteeism – Studies show up to 23% reduction in work absence after installing anti-fatigue mats



Increased productivity – Research demonstrates 2.2% net increase in overall worker productivity



Improved employee satisfaction – 93% of workers believe companies providing anti-fatigue mats care more about employees



Health benefits – Reduced back pain, leg fatigue, and circulatory problems

By supporting associate wellness at the ground level, retailers not only protect their teams' health but also create more engaged, attentive, and positive customer interactions.



> I think there's a big expectation now that what you're providing in the back of house for retail team members has to make their life easier or more comfortable. We're starting to see companies acknowledge and recognize that flooring in employee spaces is not just about anti-fatigue mats, but it's also about the psychological and mental healthiness of their employees too.

- Mat Gurda

Floors that Guide, Delight, and Drive Sales

Flooring is a powerful, but often underutilized, sales tool. It can subtly influence how customers move, where they pause, and which products they notice.

For example, studies show that 90% of shoppers naturally turn right when entering a store. Strategic flooring changes—whether in color, texture, or pattern—can reinforce or redirect that instinct. Contrasting materials can highlight promotional zones, while subtle pathways can guide customers to under-visited departments or high-margin categories.

Floor messaging through graphics and branded matting is particularly effective at sparking engagement:

- 17% to over 90% product sales lifts have been documented depending on category and execution.
- 64–65% of shoppers actively notice and interact with floor-level marketing.
- Integrated layout design, including flooring cues, signage, and traffic flow, can improve conversion rates by 20–40%, with flooring optimization alone delivering 6–10% lifts.

For instance, a large-format sporting goods retailer used contrasting LVT in its “try-and-play” zones to slow traffic and encourage dwell time, while branded matting highlighted seasonal product bundles near checkout. The result was increased interaction in those zones and measurable basket-size growth.

MatWorks offers the expertise and product range to execute these strategies seamlessly—from slip-resistant, brand-colored LVT to high-resolution custom logo mats—helping retailers turn every step into an opportunity to sell.



> Tearing out and replacing flooring can be incredibly costly and disruptive. Our goal is to be flexible, so if a brand shifts its business strategy, the store can adapt without a full redesign. With the right systems in place, we can pivot fast while the store remains operational.
>
> ***- Lara Marrero***

Enabling Operational Agility

Retail operates on seasonal cycles, promotional pivots, and consumer behavior shifts that can make a successful store layout obsolete within months. The ability to pivot quickly can make the difference between thriving and falling behind. Yet many retailers lock themselves into rigid design decisions that make adaptation costly and disruptive.

Forward-thinking brands are embracing modular, layered approaches that enable rapid transformation without operational disruption. Durable base flooring provides a neutral foundation for overlay systems, from branded mats and vinyl graphics to seasonal installations. Retailers can refresh specific zones or create promotional areas without affecting the entire store footprint.

Modular matting systems exemplify this flexibility. Individual tiles can be replaced, updated, or reconfigured as needed. A retailer can transform their entrance from holiday themes to spring launches by swapping mat sections overnight—keeping the store operational during the refresh.

Modern flooring solutions reduce total ownership costs through improved maintenance protocols. When wear occurs, spot replacement of individual tiles or mats prevents large-scale renovations that would disrupt business operations.

Quick-connect systems and lightweight materials mean store teams can handle updates without contractors or extended downtime. Brands that choose flexible flooring systems can respond quickly to market opportunities and refresh customer experiences while protecting their initial investment and maintaining continuous operations.

Zone-by-Zone Strategy - Creating a Seamless Journey

An exceptional in-store experience is rarely the result of one feature alone, it's the sum of many subtle cues and comforts layered together. Flooring is one of the few elements that touches both the customer's physical path and the associate's daily work environment, making it a powerful tool to influence perception, comfort, and behavior at every stage.

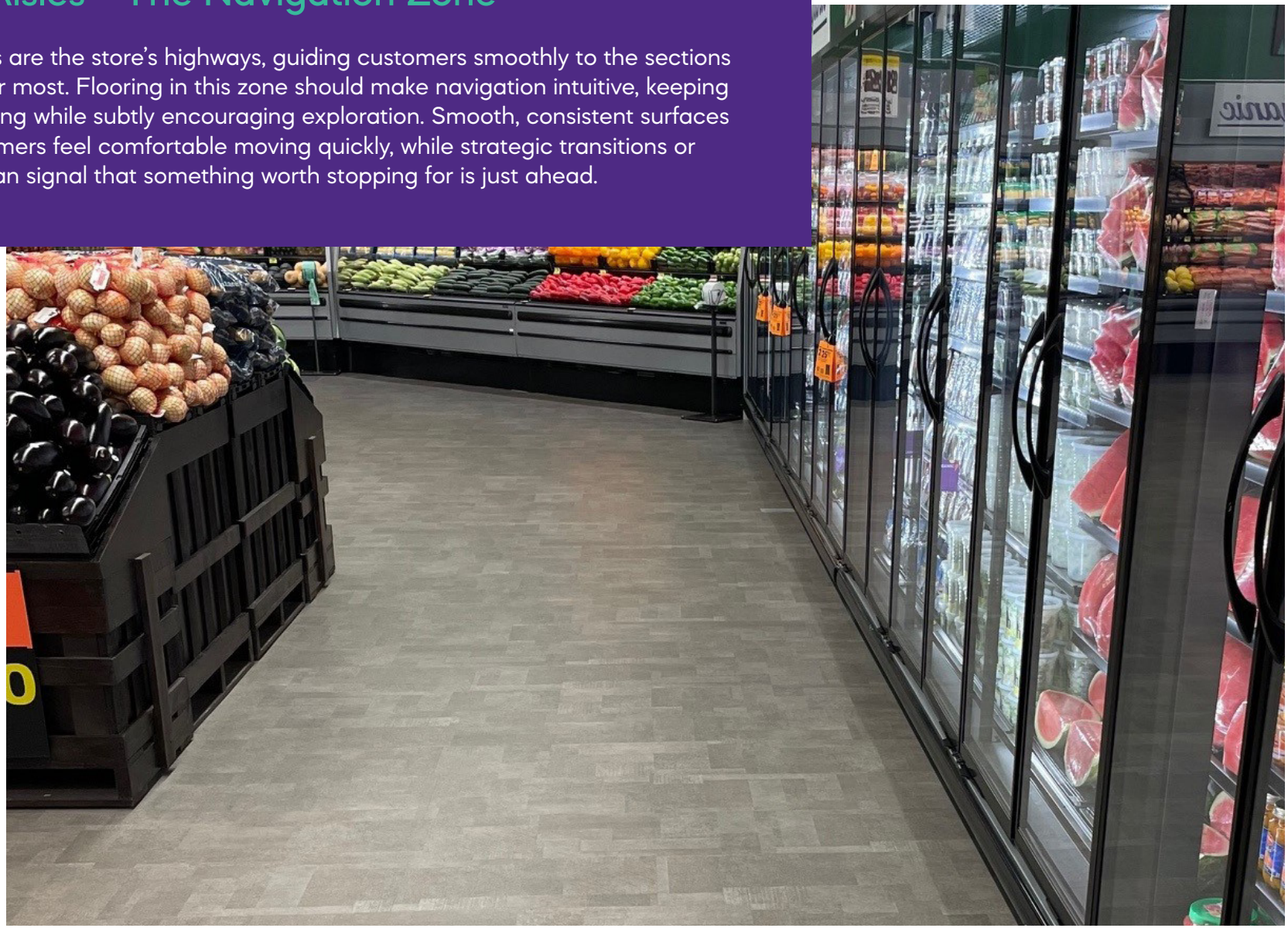


Entryway and Lobby - The First Impression Zone

This is where shoppers make split-second judgments about your store. Flooring here must capture dirt and moisture to keep interiors clean and safe, but also communicate your brand's personality—whether that's premium, playful, or performance-driven. A welcoming, well-maintained entry zone sets the tone for trust and engagement from the very first step.

Main Aisles - The Navigation Zone

Main aisles are the store's highways, guiding customers smoothly to the sections that matter most. Flooring in this zone should make navigation intuitive, keeping traffic flowing while subtly encouraging exploration. Smooth, consistent surfaces help customers feel comfortable moving quickly, while strategic transitions or patterns can signal that something worth stopping for is just ahead.





Departments and Discovery Zones - The Immersion Zone

In high-interest departments like apparel, home goods, or electronics, the flooring can cue a change in pace. A warmer texture or richer tone can invite customers to slow down, browse, and imagine products in their own lives. Visual cues underfoot can also act as silent wayfinders, directing attention to featured products or seasonal stories without interrupting the experience.

Checkout - The Decision-Closing Zone

The final stretch is as important as the first. Flooring here plays a dual role: keeping customers comfortable as they wait and supporting associates who stand for long shifts. A space that feels orderly, clean, and calm reinforces a positive last impression, while ergonomic comfort underfoot helps associates remain attentive and friendly through every transaction.



Back-of-House - The Performance Zone

The customer may never see it, but this zone impacts what they feel on the floor. Safe, fatigue-reducing flooring in prep areas, stockrooms, and service corridors helps associates move efficiently and reduces injury risks. When the team works in comfort and confidence, it shows up in their energy, service quality, and ability to keep the sales floor running smoothly.





Since different areas of a store have different needs, the flooring and matting strategy should reflect those unique demands. This table provides ideas for how you may want to approach flooring and matting in each zone and MatWorks solutions that are well-suited to the task.

Retail Zone	Customer Experience Focus	Flooring and Matting Options
Entryway and Lobby	First impressions Brand reinforcement Dirt and moisture capture	REPP-Tile™ MatShield Grid System Logo mats
Main Aisles	Smooth navigation Consistent brand look	Core Defender Vinyl Flooring
Departments and Zones	Ambiance Thematic differentiation	Core Defender Vinyl Flooring Zone-Specific Floor Graphics
Checkout Areas	Associate stamina Positive last touchpoint	Hog Heaven® TuffComfort® Impressions TuffComfort®
Back-of-House	Safety Morale Durability	Sure Stride® Matting

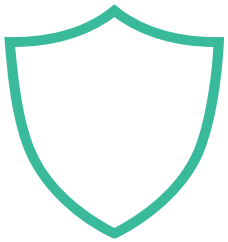
A Seamless Experience, Online to In-Store

Your store's last mile isn't just about closing a sale, it's about opening the door to repeat visits, stronger loyalty, and higher profitability. In a competitive retail landscape, every step matters—especially the first one.

Get your free Store Zone Assessment and see how MatWorks' flooring and matting solutions can:



Increase sales through better navigation and dwell time



Reduce costs by improving durability and cleaning efficiency



Strengthen your brand's environmental reputation



EXPLORE OUR CATALOG

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PROTECT EVERY STEP