

Furniture Retailing - UK - 2021

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This report looks at the following areas:

- The impact of COVID-19 on furniture retailing.
- How this disruption will change demand in the short, medium and long term and the retailing landscape.
- The rise of flexible living and its impact on furniture demand.
- The fragmentation of spending to non-specialists.
- The future of the purchasing journey for the home and the growing role of online-only retailers.

Disruption in the past year saw an unprecedented redirection of demand online in the furniture market. In fact, since the outbreak, a huge 80% of consumers have shopped for furniture online as a result of not being able to visit in-store. As a result, online retail boomed, as 77% of shoppers purchased furniture online, up from 63% in the past year alone.

This underlines the profound impact that the pandemic has had in the past year. However, in contrast to many other non-essential retail markets, this has not been characterised by a sharp decline in sales, as furniture spending slipped by only 0.8% in 2020, before recovering strongly in 2021 (4.7%). Instead, this disruption has been characterised by its impact on the retailing landscape, in how consumers shop for furniture: and the fragmentation of expenditure to non-specialists, whether online or in-store.

This fragmentation represents a significant issue for the furniture specialists sector. Although the sector will regain momentum as restrictions and anxiety ease in the second half of 2021, as many continue to necessitate first-person in-store contact, particularly in bigger ticket purchases. Multichannel specialists will have to be proactive to recover ground once these restrictions ease, in combatting the rise of pure-players such as Amazon, and in regaining in-store footfall from non-specialists such as DIY and general retailers, which will look to build on the foothold established since the outbreak.



“Furniture spending dropped sharply in mid-2020, driven by store closures, a sharp decline in the housing market and a reduced appetite for big-ticket purchases. This has quickly recovered, however, as the home gained from extended periods inside and redirected spending.”

– Marco Amasanti, Retail Analyst

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This challenge for furniture specialists will be eased in part, however, by pent-up demand, and the windfall of bigger-ticket home projects in the coming years. The past year has seen many consumers re-evaluate, living spaces (particularly communal), and prioritise them in future spending; often buoyed by that money redirected from other sectors in this period.



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