

# **Urban Outfitters to Anthropologie: From Hipster Grunge to Hippie Chic**

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## **Abstract**

Anthropologie is a brand that strives for customer loyalty and admiration above all other goals. They seek consumers who yearn for an emotional attachment to their retail experience; those that want to be part of a group but still feel they can attain individuality while shopping with others. The following research shows how the Anthropologie brand has ignited this desire among shoppers while allowing them to maintain the belief that their unique style is inherent within them. The brand has invented a lifestyle that is both captivating and attainable – at a certain cost.

Anthropologie comes to life in their brick and mortar retail stores where sensory consumption and lifestyle retailing dominate. The distinctive combination of the senses, specifically hearing and smell, capture their shopper as if they were an audience member witnessing an elaborate show. This technique of appealing to the senses creates the customer loyalty they seek while providing an environment where memories are shaped. In Anthropologie, the focus is not only the material benefit of purchases but the added emotional response as well. Both functional and non functional elements exist for this shopper.

## **Introduction**

Anthropologie is a retailer owned by Urban Outfitters, Inc. They are a young brand compared to their competitors, but that fresh outlook has allowed for their unique talent to be showcased. Anthropologie was founded in 1992 by a small group of innovators with a common goal: to “inspire the imagination” (“About Us”). After the brand’s introduction, new ideas were inspired through extensive travel and exploration. They refer to their customers as their “soul mates” (“About Us”) and deep and spiritual bond acts as a catalyst for motivating the designers and everyone involved in continuing the brand’s success.

## **Company History**

Before Anthropologie, Urban Outfitters was the company’s focus since its inception in 1970. Urban Outfitters targets men and women between the ages of 18-30. After 12 years of successful business, the owners recognized a need in the market for their customers who were outgrowing their product line. This was the launching point for Anthropologie. The man responsible for Anthropologie’s success is Glen Senk, who began his career at

Bloomingdales and later ran mail order for Williams-Sonoma. He joined Urban Outfitters in 1994 and began building the Anthropologie brand. Senk's success stems from his "healthy disregard for the conventions of retail." (LaBarre) He states,

"In my experience, retailers spend most of their time looking at things from the company's perspective or the marketer's perspective ...they talk about trends and brands but rarely about the customer in a meaningful way. We're customer experts. Our focus is on always doing what's right for a specific customer we know very well."  
(LaBarre)

### **Anthropologie Today**

Anthropologie's target market is women between the ages of 30-40 who are both affluent and individuals who want to reflect their unique style with what they wear. Senk goes beyond the surface and considers their target customer a "friend" (LaBarre). He refers to her as "well-read and well-traveled. She is very aware – she gets our references, whether it's a town in Europe or to a book or a movie. She's urban minded. She's into cooking, gardening, and wine. She has a natural curiosity about the world. She's relatively fit" (LaBarre).



**Figure 1: 1801 Walnut Street Anthropologie Storefront**  
Photo courtesy of Gabriella D'Urso. All rights reserved.

Anthropologie sells merchandise ranging from women's apparel and accessories to home goods. They sell primarily through their retail store but also do well with sales through

their catalog and website. Their assortment is unique and cannot be matched by any other retailer. Their buyers strive to find actual items that inspire their own designs. The buying teams travel throughout Europe, India and the U.K. searching antique stores and flea markets to seek out one-of-a-kind pieces. They distribute these “found objects” within their assortment, mixing them in with other pieces designed specifically for Anthropologie (Southerland). This creates a range of product that is unusual and specific to each store location. Another important concept that adds to the success of their retail store is its location. They stay away from malls, favoring a spot on the street to get that “village atmosphere” (Southerland). They prefer to stand alone, rather than in a cluster of stores.

Anthropologie designs their products with extreme attention to detail and craftsmanship. Their goal is for the shopper to have a personal experience and relationship to each detail of every item they find. They design items with the changing world in mind. Their design and innovation is never stagnant, rather it is fluid and ever changing.

One of Anthropologie’s greatest achievements is their ability to make high end luxury casual. Even their simplest items have a twist or unique flair about their appearance and fit. An important differentiating factor about Anthropologie in comparison to their competitors is that they do not advertise. They prefer to abide by the old fashioned concept of word-of-mouth as well as natural curiosity to draw customers into the store. Senk explains, “We spend the money that other companies spend on marketing to create a store experience that exceeds people's expectations. We don't spend money on messages -- we invest in execution” (LaBarre). This bold decision has elevated Anthropologie to the status they enjoy.

### **Sensory Consumption**

Sensory consumption is crucial to brick and mortar retail stores. The experience should start even before the customer enters the space, like music that can be heard on the street, or scents that entice customers from blocks away. Sensory consumption sets the mood of the retail space, which in turn effects every decision made during a shopping trip. This initial mood must be pleasant or the customer’s experience won’t end well. At Anthropologie, the focus is on the senses of smell and hearing. As soon as you enter the retail store the music sets the tone as a calm environment. Anthropologie also has a signature scent which works with the music to relax their shopper. According to Kim, Forney and Sullivan, scent is the strongest sense tied to your memory and emotions. This is a primary reason why shoppers remember their experience and associate either a positive or negative association which different retailers (“Sensory Consumption”).

These senses create emotion about the products and the overall brand. Lighting, color, temperature, and touch are other important environmental stimuli that add to the experience (Kim, Forney and Sullivan, “Sensory Consumption”). Shopping at Anthropologie is a multi-sensory experience because they use more than one sense to captivate the shopper. The combination of these senses creates a strong brand-consumer relationship and experience that transforms into brand loyalty. This process motivates consumers to become routine shoppers.

Anthropologie varies from other retailers because they offer not only physical attributes to the shopper – the actual product – but they offer non-physical attributes too. Many other retailers do not understand this distinction. The non-physical attributes are almost more important than the physical ones, since the customer associates the product with feel-good emotions and a sense of self improvement on a higher level. These emotions directly stimulate behavior in buying patterns.

### **Lifestyle Retailing**

Anthropologie is one of the best examples of lifestyle retailing. Not only does the brand sell apparel, home ware, and accessories but they appeal to their customer's sense of well-being as a whole. Lifestyle retailing affects both individual and social identities. Consumers need both identities fulfilled in order to reach self actualization (Kim, Forney and Sullivan, "Lifestyle Retailing"). They first need to understand their individual identity and then their social identity. Retailers have the power to shape and mold these perceptions. Anthropologie understands the importance of feeling part of a social group, while still being in tune with your personal identity. That balance must be in harmony. Once the social identity overtakes the personal understanding of the self, the balance is lost and the brand has failed. Lifestyle retailers aim to sell a wide variety of product to their customers, adding convenience to their lives. For the customers, they seek out a lifestyle that is recognizable and fits with their ideals. Even those who are not aware of this process fit into a lifestyle that is exemplified by their favorite retailer.

### **My Trip to Anthropologie**

Each person has a different relationship with Anthropologie. Each experience is unique and offers appeal on an individual level. Some retailers offer a universal experience, and that is part of their charm. Wal-Mart for example, offers their customer a simple experience that is familiar every time, leading them to return. One often views their experience at Wal-Mart as comfortable and recognizable. This benefits them, adding credibility to their name. In contrast, Anthropologie is one of the few retailers that strives to differentiate themselves in every way possible. They fall on the other side of the spectrum from Wal-Mart and other big box retailers. The individual experience they offer customers serves as a benefit.

In my experience, visiting the Anthropologie flagship store on 1801 Walnut Street is both stimulating and overwhelming. When first entering the building I am inspired by its perfect architecture and grand entrance (figure 1). No detail is forgotten - even the door handle is a majestic iron replica of a tree branch. Once inside, my sensory stimulation goes wild. From floor to high ceilings, the place is packed full of everything from shelves of folded t-shirts and racks displaying beautiful dresses to toys and trinkets displayed in a haphazard, yet elegant, arrangement. The main level brings me in by the staircase, giving me the choice of traveling upstairs or downstairs. On the main floor I see casual wear interspersed with delicate jewelry and accessories. There is no strict layout or overly structured sense of merchandising, yet it is clear that placement is crucial to the customer

experience. Items are displayed casually, no one piece given focus over the others. It is this arrangement that gives every knick knack and trinket authority over the space. The “found items” are scattered about reminding me to visit the home wares section downstairs.

Aside from the actual merchandise, even being inside the Anthropologie building is entertaining. The high ceilings lend themselves to grand display methods; all usually hand crafted and time consuming endeavors. The current design showcases the beautiful sense of light the building has by using colorful paper cut into squares and sculpted into shapes as architectural pieces that enhance the space. This home-crafted feel gives a simple message, reminding the shopper of home cooked meals and family values. These traits are not typical of retail spaces. Everything about shopping at Anthropologie is inspiring on some level, whether it evokes a childhood memory or encourages plans for the future.



**Figure 2: Display featuring dresses and tank tops**  
Photo courtesy of Gabriella D'Urso. All rights reserved.

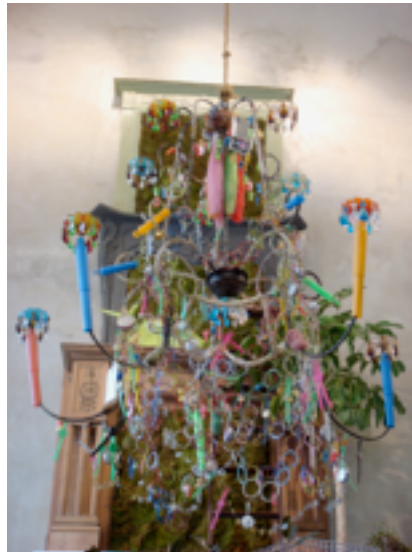
The three other levels within the store are connected by a grand spiral staircase complete with landings displaying 7 foot tall mirrors and collections of candlesticks. Downstairs on the bottom level I find the home wares section and the saleroom (figures 2, 3). To the right is a charming nature-inspired nook with stuffed animals and children's books huddle under a magnificent chandelier used only for decoration. This nook is a pleasant getaway from the rest of the store. It is there to comfort the shopper and evoke nostalgia (although of course the items are for sale too!). This area blends into the home ware section with mismatched doorknobs and salt and peppershakers shaped as barnyard animals.



**Figure 3: Display featuring home ware items**

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Back upstairs on the third floor, things are a bit smaller. Displays up here are simpler - mostly tables with folded items and hanging racks behind them. On the fourth floor I find the bedding and sleepwear collections as well as the fitting rooms. This floor is perhaps the largest, allowing for full size beds to be dressed in featured bedding. Other furniture is displayed too, ranging from a cozy armchair to a vintage-inspired replica of a wooden toilet. These grand pieces are interspersed with delicate nightgowns and robes along with a collection of perfumes and lotions. Even the music is adapted for this floor. It is dreamlike and slow, with a lounge-like edge.



**Figure 3: Decorative Chandelier**

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Leaving the Anthropologie store is like leaving a fantasy land – it is difficult to do. It seems there is always something more to experience. It is that lasting feeling that draws customers back every time. They seek that relaxation and intellectual stimulation from their shopping environment. Anthropologie is seen as a getaway; as a departure from the typical shopping experience where the goal of the retailer is to yield as much profit as possible.

### **Conclusion**

Anthropologie's success has come from years of studying customer behaviors and lifestyles but the result is not a brand that is calculated and conformist. It is a brand that understands their sense of self and their unique placement in the retail world. Within the confines of who they are as a brand, they have found movement and possibility and opportunity for the future.

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