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## BUSINESS EYE

# Customer isolation

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**T**his week's business news that on average 19 pubs in England are closing every week is a sign of the quiet, relentless revolution in play on our High Streets, driven by the new habits we are enjoying at home.

Footfall into pubs is not the only walk-in weakness.

Last week ToysRUs and Maplins both closed their doors meaning over 300 store closures and many thousands of redundancies. Even the darling of the retail world, John Lewis, just reported a 77 per cent drop in profits. Something significant is clearly afoot.

You might not immediately connect the massive increase in the incidence of myopia (short-sightedness) nor the fact that around three quarters of us now suffer from eye strain on a daily-basis with these shop closures, but they are both borne of the same underlying cause. Screen technologies are leading us to spend much more time at home than our parents used to.

What's more, even when we are out at work or in the street many of us exist locked inside our own world with screen and headphones switched on.

We message people via WhatsApp and email more than by phone or through deploying the age-old technology of actually talking to each other. I'm not joking when I write that my team has made it an objective to mandate talking to one another again!

These days we buy groceries, shop for clothes, look for love, place a bet, book travel, get music and bank online

via our phones, all activities which used to take us outside into the street, into stores and into common spaces.

Our lives are becoming more isolated today as we do more and more from home and less and less together.

This means fundamental change to your business and to mine, but have you noticed the impacts on your trade?

For example, in the face of brutal competition from Amazon it's no wonder that you can get great coffee at many book shops today. A caffeine injection seems to be one of the few buoyant footfall areas on the high street, but libraries are closing.

When was the last time you went to a library? Book shops are being forced to fight back by offering a book buying experience that enough people enjoy enough to pay all their costs. At the same time, they have to offer easy competitive online supply and service.

Is your business adjusting to this new reality?