

Sneaker launch trends: Stores and fans tell us what they want in 2026

Presented by **EQL**

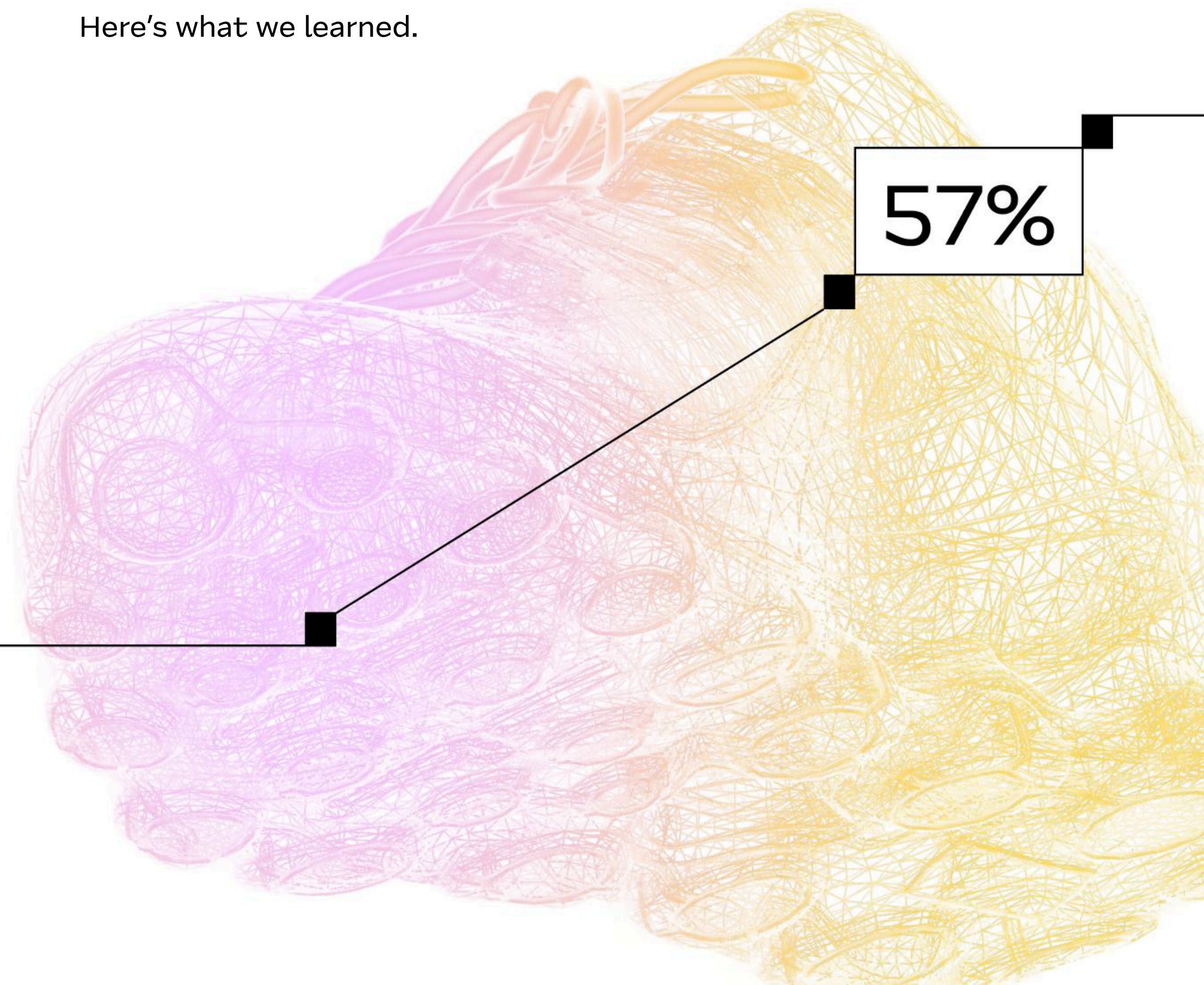


Limited-edition sneaker drops are the heartbeat of sneaker culture. But the culture is changing, and many are wondering: what do fans really want? And what challenges are stores facing behind the scenes?



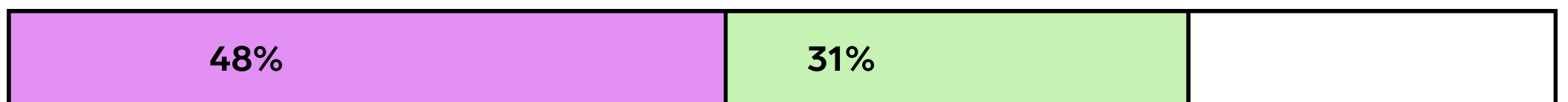
EQL gathered insights from 500+ sneakerheads and neighborhood sneaker stores—to find out.

Here's what we learned.



Fans are showing
up, but they
want more...

Most sneakerheads go in person to their
favorite stores regularly:



Nearly half pop into their local
physical store every few months

Another 31% are there
every single week



Daily Site visits

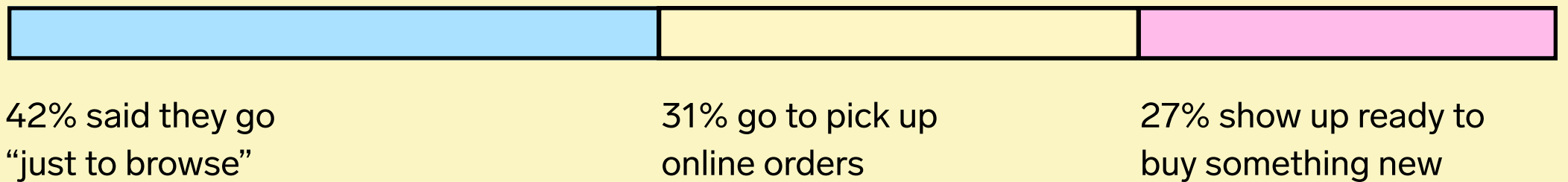
Weekly site visits

Clearly, sneakerheads are TUNED IN. They're engaged. But it's
up to the stores to make the most of that engagement.

Browsers vs. buyers: the conversion opportunity for sneaker stores



When fans head to a store:



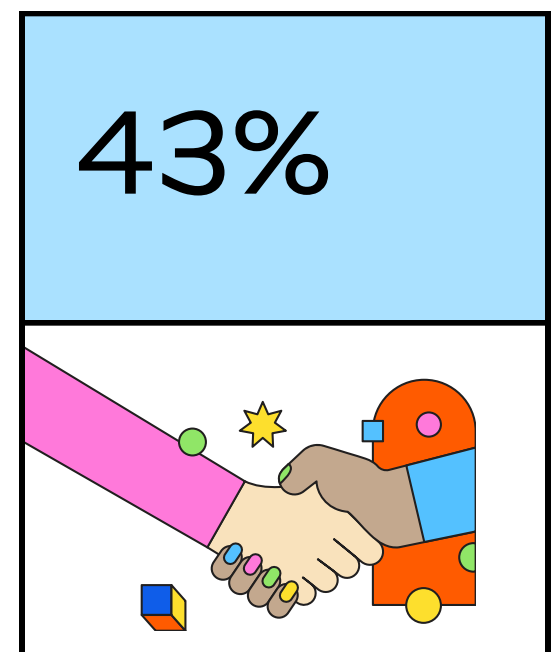
86% admitted they end up spending more than they planned once they are there.

Stores: that's your cue. Browsers are buyers waiting to happen. Got something hot coming? Make sure it's front and center in your store, whether it's a live or upcoming launch, or a date to look out for the newest release.

Loyalty Is Earned, Not Assumed

Only 43% of fans said they feel real loyalty to their local store. The rest? They'll shop anywhere

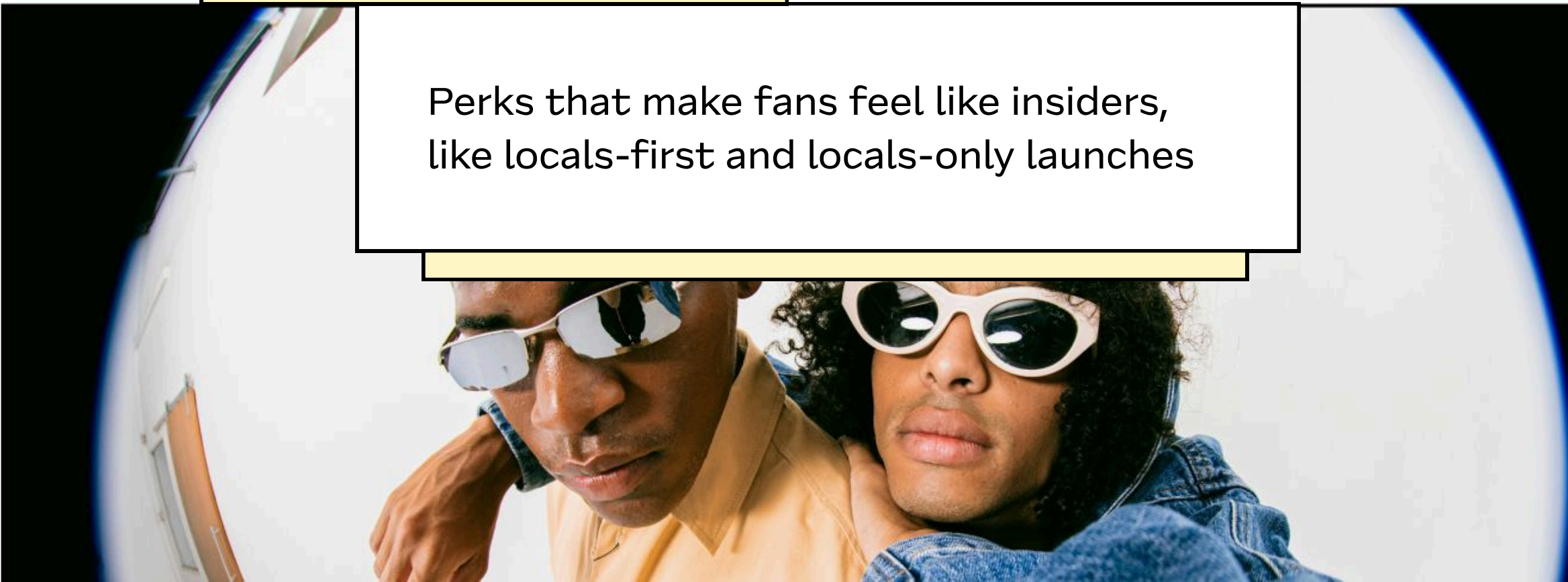
Here's what they told us will win their loyalty:



Exclusive events

Personal connections

Perks that make fans feel like insiders, like locals-first and locals-only launches



What stores told us: challenges and must-haves



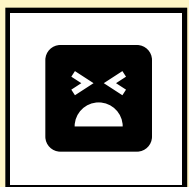
While fans are dreaming of better drops, the people behind the scenes of sneaker retail shared what keeps them up at night:

Matching inventory to demand was the #1 headache. EQL's data luckily gives insight to help inform future drops.

Post-launch momentum often fizzles after pairs sell out

Tech failures can derail big days

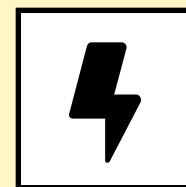
And when we asked what they value most from tools like EQL?



Bot protection came first—stores want real fans, not bots, winning pairs

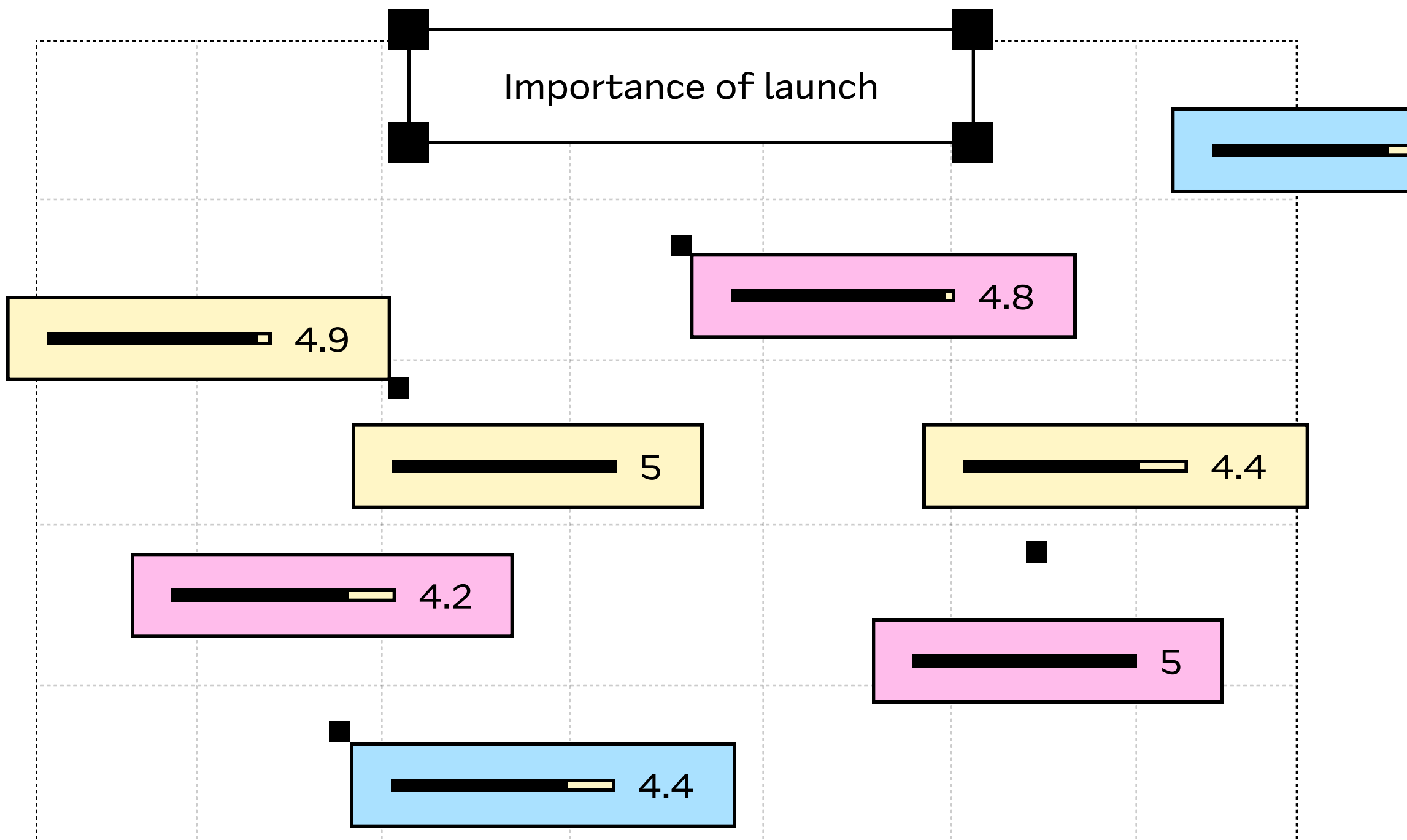


Locals-first access and **VIP lists** help reward loyal customers



Reliable tech is essential; no one wants a drop to crash at go-time

Looking ahead: launches = growth



On a scale of 1–5, stores rated launches 4.4/5 in importance for their next two years of growth. In other words: **this isn't just about hype anymore. Drops are an essential business strategy.**

The Big Picture

Fans and stores are aligned on one thing: launches matter.

Fans want more community moments and rewards for their loyalty.



Stores want bots to miss out, reliable tech for big launches, and ways to keep the excitement alive after launch day.

Put those together, and you've got a recipe for stronger communities, bigger sales, and stores that feel like more than just stores.



Want to know
how EQL can
help?

Schedule a demo today and let
us help you take your sneaker
store to the next level.

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