

A touch of design class from Primark on Oxford Street

The value fashion retailer's ability to reinvent itself while staying true to its core principles won its shop at the east end of Oxford Street Store Design of the Year. Claire Burke reports

Primark is not a company that stands still. The retail giant has a knack for reinventing itself, as its flagship store at the east end of Oxford Street shows.

When the shop opened in September 2012, it revealed an interior that felt modern and upmarket. Far from looking like a discount retailer, the store, on the corner of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road, featured slick in-store digital screens, a trend room and super-sized neon. Some of the first shoppers through its doors even described it as "posh". The retailer had accomplished the difficult task of creating an environment that appeared fashionable and stylish, but also got its value message out.

Three-in-one

Occupying 82,400 sq ft of retail space, the store comprises three buildings melded into one, mixing historic with contemporary façades, and is spread over four floors. Design consultancy Dalziel and Pow was tasked with combining the individual heritage of the three buildings with a digital fashion experience. The aim was to take the brand's personality to another level, with a new layer of digital communication and brand imagery.

Throughout the building there are digital screens displaying promotional content, lending the store a dynamic, interactive feel that is designed to entice shoppers.

Large-format digital screens set within the windows show videos to interact with passing shoppers.

A central feature of the store is a huge LED screen, which is situated at the foot of the main escalator and covers the wall where the lifts are situated. A series of films are played on the wall, showcasing the attitude of the brand and highlighting Primark's credentials as a young fashion retailer.

These short films reinforce



Primark's store on the corner of Oxford Street incorporates new technology but maintains a focus on fashion

Primark's fashion credibility and celebrate its youthful, fun attitude. The LED screen also displays seasonal campaigns – its flexibility means it can accommodate changing content.

Primark had a vast store to design but has used the space well. The digital features, such as hardware and content, are often the most chal-

lenging aspects of a project like this. However, they are also the most exciting part of the store and the overall effect is a dynamic, fashion-focused environment. The large screen across the lift wall in particular creates a buzz around the store.

Primark chief executive Paul Marchant said: "An exciting and inspiring store environment creates the essential backdrop to showcase Primark's unique product proposition."

Original features of the building such as brick arches and large windows have been retained and revealed, and the store mixes

flashes of fluorescent colour with these heritage features. Behind a set of cash desks on the ground floor, images are projected on to brick arches – an interesting overlay of Primark's fast-moving fashion against the solid structure of the building.

Bold, confident typography, combined with use of exposed LEDs and supersized neon have created a contemporary look. A trend room – a darker, theatrical space with its own entrance on Tottenham Court Road – has the feel of a separate shop and promotes an edited pick of new styles.

**"WE'VE REALLY
PUNCHED THE
PRIMARK MESSAGE
IN THIS STORE"**

Paul Marchant, Primark



Primark's high-volume merchandising strategy is put to full effect and there are frequent appearances of its name

of wall highlighting tourist destinations and local landmarks, including the Primark store, anchors the store firmly in the capital and plays on the brand's reputation as a fashion destination for tourists.

Primark's business model is based on high sales volumes and it was vital that the interior design encouraged this. The store therefore has 111 cash desks and 92 fitting rooms, all provided and installed by shopfitter Havelock Europa, and at peak times 2,500 customers can shop in the store.

Pointing the way

In a store this size, it is crucial that shoppers can find their way around. Office workers popping in at lunchtime, for example, will want to locate items quickly. Floor-to-ceiling merchandising signage helps customers find their bearings and the wide walkways through the ground floor departments make navigation straightforward.

Escalators in the centre of the store are positioned in an open atrium. Writing on the Retail Design Blog, Dalziel and Pow says: "Department-specific frame walls line the escalators, and merchandise is merged with visual merchandising and graphic and digital

communication to ensure the shopping experience is as lively in the atrium as it is on the shop floor."

While the interior design is suggestive of a more expensive offering, designers simultaneously had to promote the retailer's value message. They achieve this with signs declaring the retailer's core "Amazing Fashion, Amazing Prices" message, and Primark's name is visible in many places.

When the store opened Marchant said: "We've really punched the Primark message in this store."

The judges praised Primark's verve in presenting low-priced products in an exciting and appealing manner. One judge said: "They have fitted a store out like it's mid-market to upmarket but the product is cheap as chips. They've created an environment that doesn't put people off, and gets the value message across."

Opening a second flagship store on London's Oxford Street was seen as a brave move. With a branch at Marble Arch and a store by Tottenham Court Road tube station, the retailer now bookends the popular shopping district.

However, concerns that the new store would cannibalise customers from the Marble Arch branch have

not been borne out. In fact, both are exceeding expectations from a commercial perspective. And with Primark yet to move into online retail – its trial with Asos ended last year – a prominent bricks-and-mortar presence is crucial.

Primark certainly has big ambitions for the store, with plans to expand it by more than a quarter in 2016, taking the floorspace to 190,000 sq ft.

While the eastern end of Oxford Street has traditionally been a poor relation to the thriving, bustling western end, its fortunes could be about to change. The Crossrail project could have a massive impact on footfall in the area, with a new transport hub at Tottenham Court Road due to be complete in 2018.

The judges also believe that the arrival of Primark will help to regenerate this end of Oxford Street. Footwear retailer Schuh has revealed that it will open a store adjacent to Primark in early 2016.

The fast-paced fashion retailer says it is committed to continuous development and it shows no sign of slowing down.

The judges particularly praised Primark's ability to reinvent itself, and the retailer's east Oxford Street store is a classic example. ★

Static screens advertise some of the season's key looks.

Another important design objective was to allow the brand to feel local to London, while retaining the flavour of existing flagship stores such as those in Berlin, Edinburgh and Stratford.

Fixtures in the womenswear department that recreate a London Underground tube carriage are fun and reflect the city's character. The feature is also a nod to the 'fashion line' (the Tube's Central Line) which links the other Primark stores at Marble Arch and Stratford. An illustrated map across a section