

# STORES

Tech giant Dixons Carphone has adapted its multibrand format to make it work in London's West End.

**John Ryan** reports

## Making three into one

**D**ixons Carphone, the technology company formed by the fusion of three fascias, has come under share price pressure since the Brexit referendum. At the time of writing, it had lost more than a quarter of its value in the prior month, and a quick glance at a graph for the past year shows a retailer whose shares are almost 40% lower than they were at the beginning of 2016.

A tricky time then and since June 24 it is almost certainly the case that consumers are more anxious about buying big-ticket items, which is likely to hit Dixons Carphone more than some. That said, unlike many who find themselves in a similar position, and in spite of what is a parlous performance for investors, this is a retailer that looks forward and takes the present on the chin, so to speak.

And one indication of that approach is apparent, on Oxford Street. There had been a branch of Currys PC World at the eastern end of the street for years, and it looked very much like an electrical retailer of old with long lines of product and a relatively low ceiling, all contributing to a vaguely claustrophobic experience. The old store actually closed on June 30, the day the new one, a few doors west, opened – and the difference between the two branches could hardly be greater.

### Sharp contrast

In place of a low frontage, the new store, which trades from two floors across 6,000 sq ft, has what would be a treble-height frontage, were it not for a couple of bands of shiny metal that extend across the exterior serving to frame the entrance as well as support the structure. What confronts the shopper then is one of the new breed of stores that are finally making east Oxford Street the sort of place you might want to spend some time shopping in.



### CURRYS PC WORLD CARPHONE WAREHOUSE,

94-98 OXFORD STREET

**Opened** June 30, 2016

**Size** 6,000 sq ft

**Number of floors** 2

**Design** In-house

**Shopfit** Itab UK

**Ambience** Digital slick



This Dixons Carphone branch is, in fact, a diminutive example of the rather clunkily-named Currys PC World Carphone Warehouse stores, where the various brands that comprise the company have been brought together under one roof. Which does beg the question: how can it all be fitted into a space this size,

even if there are two floors?

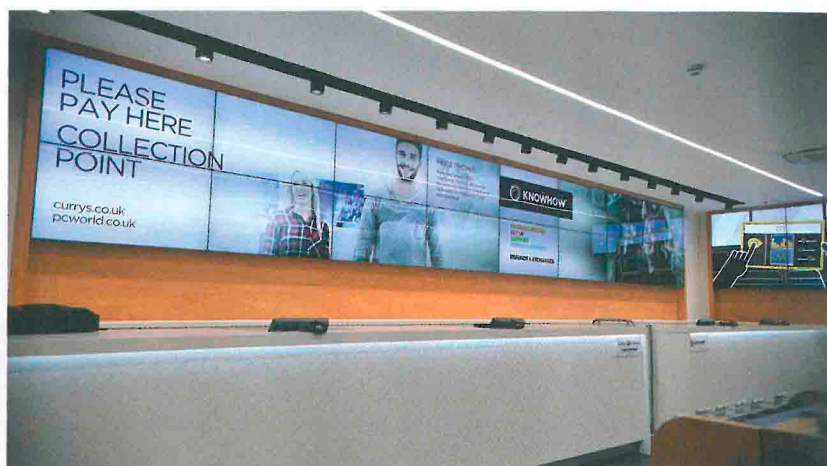
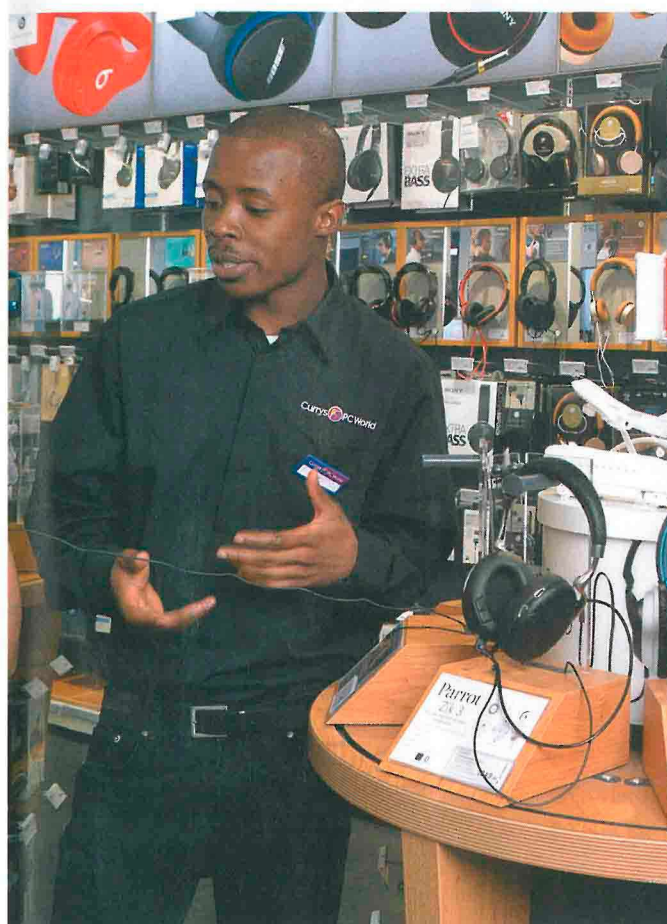
The answer, of course, is that it can't, and this store is a far cry from the 40,000 sq ft single-floor 3-in-1 format that introduced the concept in the fourth quarter of 2015 in Hedge End, Southampton. Instead, this is a store that contains elements of the three brands and some product omis-



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# e add up



sions, which are available online and can be ordered while in-store. Neil Hollins, executive director of formats and business change, says: "We have done some careful editing of ranges for a city centre customer. This is the little brother of the big store."

Practically, this means that the ground floor is about smart-

**"We have done some careful editing of ranges for a city centre customer. This is the little brother of the big store"**

Neil Hollins, Dixons Carphone

phones and computing while upstairs it is dedicated consumer electronics.

Or put another way, white goods, which are the bedrock of the Currys offer, are nowhere to be seen, but can be ordered on a same-day delivery basis, subject to location.

Back to the front of the store,

however, and it would be quite hard to miss when on Oxford Street, thanks to a 50 sqm ultra-high-definition digital wall, which is the largest of its kind on the Street, according to Hollins.

"Whether you're on a bus or on foot, you can't help but be grabbed by what's going on," he says.



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He has a point: the left-hand wall can be viewed through the almost floor-to-ceiling glazed frontage and is a sea of pin-sharp moving images that follow the line of the escalator. It's a bit like looking at a giant film screen, except that it happens to be on a very busy shopping street; to the right, suspended lighting fixtures in the shape of overlapping circles add to the spectacle.

## Mobile first

Head indoors and first up comes Carphone. Hollins observes that there is some pretty serious local competition for Dixons Carphone – Virgin, O2 and EE, among others, all have major stores just a few minutes walk away and therefore it was important that this store put mobile's best foot forward.

The Carphone Warehouse offer in this store is arranged along the right-hand wall with a few free-standing mid-shop units in front. It is small but perhaps, rather more importantly, it does look almost full, integrated with the rest of the shop – no small feat with a brand that has such a distinctive handwriting.

Beyond this, there are laptops, tablets and suchlike, all of them displayed on what Dixons, in the days before the Carphone merger, would have referred to as "playtables". Over time these have become rather more modular in form (the first store that featured something similar was the Dixons' Blacks store in Birmingham which opened at the end of 2010) and it is easy to see how what is on view in Oxford



**"Such is the power of the digital wall, in terms of the light it sheds, that a large part of the floor and ceiling appear to change colour, depending on what is being shown on the screens"**

Street could be replicated elsewhere.

At the back of the first floor another illuminated wall is where the Knowhow information and advice desk is and this too looks slick and modern, with shiny

white surfaces complementing the backwall screens.

Also on the first floor the consumer electronics are, for the most part, displayed on mid-shop wood-fronted units, all of which are waist-high. It is the digital wall that dominates, however, and next to it a head-phone wall has more screens at its top, with images of the various branded products that are on offer. Such is the power of the digital wall, in terms of the light it sheds, that a large part of the floor and ceiling appear to change colour, depending on what is being shown on the screens.

Couple all of this with the Nespresso shop-in-shop, to cater for the metropolitan crowd, and a

Dyson shop (similar to what was done in Hedge End) and the majority of electronic needs for the city dweller are met by this store.

Hollins says that the fitout is "about a third more expensive than a standard shopfit, but a large proportion of the cost was taken up with the structural elements".

The interior is a step on from what can be seen in the Southampton 3-in-1 branch and shows how three retail brands really can be made to work together to create something that is altogether better than the sum of the parts.

The share price may be under pressure owing to consumer reticence in the face of an uncertain economy, but this store represents planning for the future and looks set to come good in the long term.