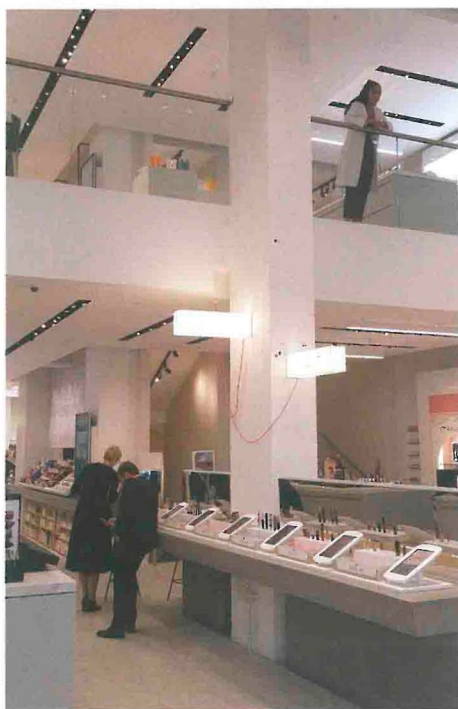
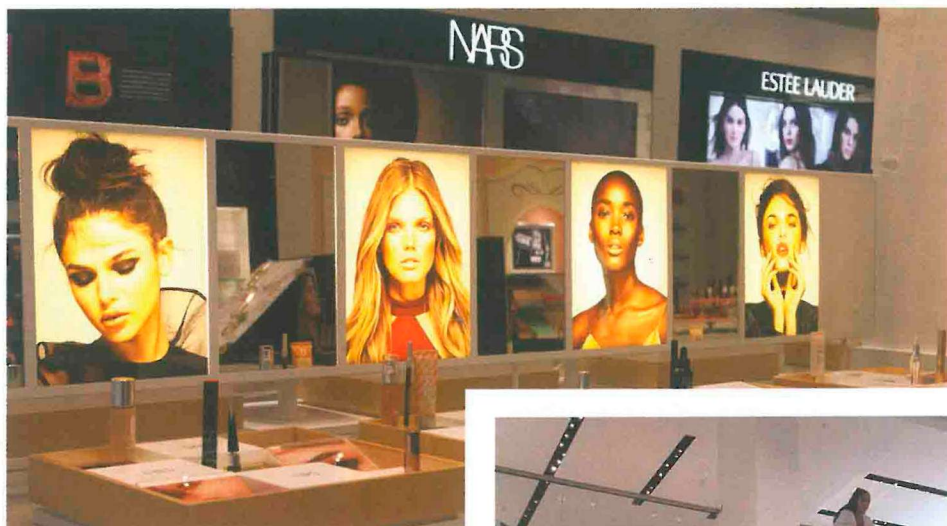


NEXT-GEN RETAIL

The new Fabled store on Tottenham Court Road combines tech with a human face. **John Ryan** reports

A Fabled start-up



Why would a magazine and an online grocer wish to open a beauty shop? More to the point, even supposing they wished to do so, why would they choose to team up to do it?

The answers to these questions are actually straightforward. The magazine in question is *Marie Claire* and the supermarket is Ocado. For *Marie Claire* the proposition is simple. This is an organ with a relatively affluent female readership and a distinct focus on fashion and beauty. Opening a store with its name over the door would make sense for no better reason than that it can lend its editorial authority to a category where consumers very often seek advice from magazines, meaning that it has almost instant shopper loyalty.

For Ocado, fulfilment and a move beyond its food-only proposition surely looks like a winner, and it is teaming up with one of the leading players in the field.

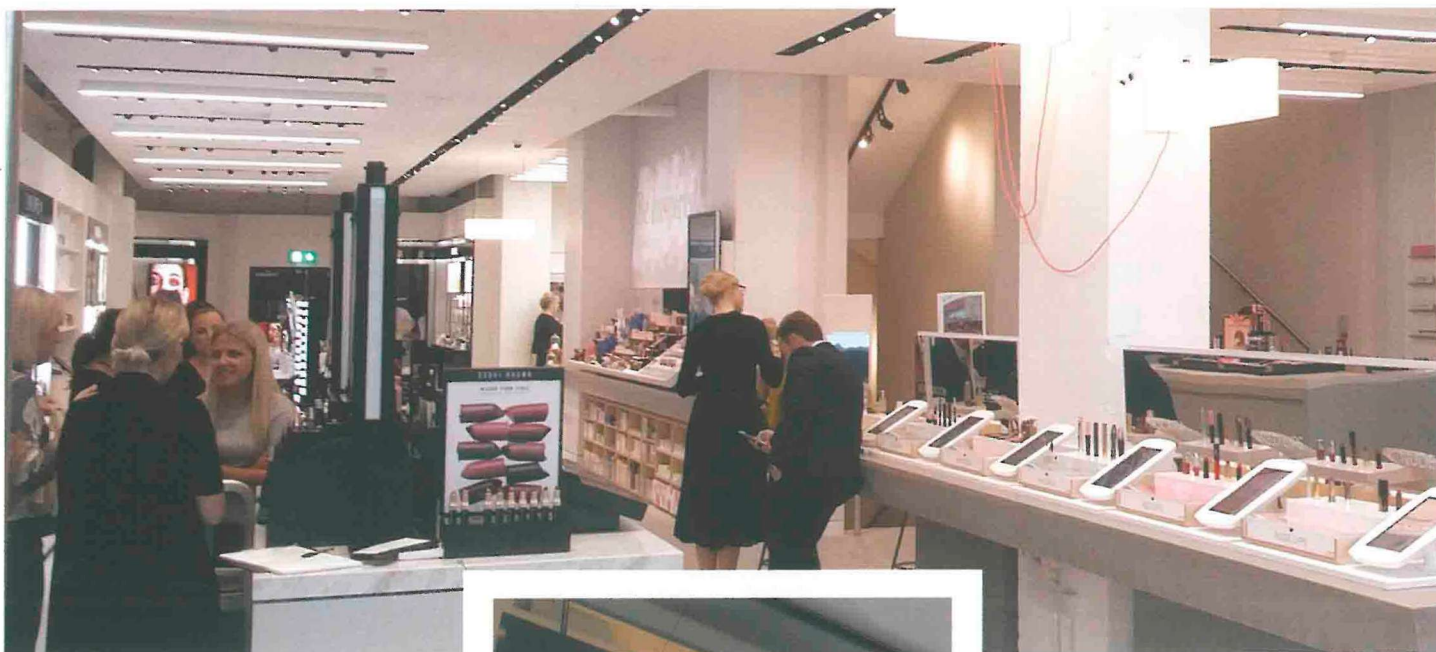
“The approach was a service-driven offer with quite a few niche brands as well”

The outcome is Fabled by *Marie Claire* (on the east side of the southern end of London's Tottenham Court Road – another part of this long street that has undergone an almost total transformation over the past 18 months). For neighbours, Fabled has T2, Planet Organic and Waterstones, among others, and the area has gone from being a cut-price electronics retail backwater to a real destination as shoppers turn the corner from Primark, which straddles both Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road.

Fabled is in a new neighbourhood and as a proposition it is solely about beauty and information. Designed by London-based consultancy GPStudio, the first thing that the passerby will notice is a glass-frontage with the store name emblazoned in a simple white font against a black background. A dark marble surround and black metal to divide the different parts of the glazed frontage complete the picture, offering an unfussy face to the world and allowing the shopper to see into a brightly lit, white interior.

This is a two-floor store, with an upper-level mezzanine, like all of the other shops on this strip. This means that shoppers entering the

NEXT-GEN RETAIL



► store probably scan the first floor, or at least the front portion of it, as much as they do that which is immediately in front of them. Otherwise, the thing that most visitors are likely to notice is the brands. GPStudio partner Gregor Jackson, whose consultancy worked on the store, says: "The approach was a service-driven offer with quite a few niche brands as well."

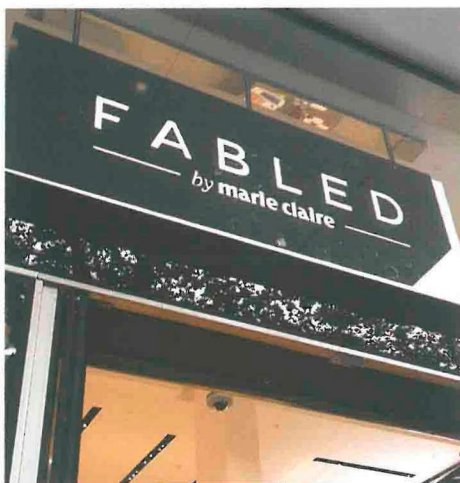
This, to an extent, answers the obvious question of whether another store selling branded beauty products is needed. At the better end of the mass-market, which to a large degree is what this store is, there are many

"Fabled is in the vanguard of those coupling in-store tech with service"

stores where the same products can be found, and service therefore becomes a possible differentiator. Fabled is predominantly an online business and as Jackson comments, the store is an adjunct to this: "It [Fabled] was a start-up business. It was a beauty business with the idea that the online business should be the mothership, but it wanted to have a bricks-and-mortar representation."

As an online proposition with a physical arm it is therefore reasonable to suppose that technology would play a substantial part in this interior, and so it proves. Jackson says: "The tech is about reminding customers about the website and pushing them back online."

In store this means that as well as the usual mid-shop tables with an array of beauty products, there are a large number of small screens that offer advice, tips and videos for beauty seekers. Again, retailers such as



Fabled

WHERE

Tottenham Court Road

OPENED

August 2016

NUMBER OF FLOORS

Two (ground and mezzanine)

SIZE

7,200 sq ft

STORE DESIGN

GPStudio

AMBIANCE

Minimalist with a friendly face

STORE FITOUT

Cumberland Construction

It is also worth noting that as well as the smaller screens, there are also large, high-resolution digital screens. Jackson says the underlying intention behind these is not just to promote branded content, but to allow the brand owners who have space in the store to takeover the store using these screens when they have an 'event' – something that is increasingly an integral part of beauty retail.

To an extent, this is a store that delivers what the shopper might expect when a magazine meets a beauty store environment. There are a range of brands, but all of them are kept within the store framework, with none of them being allowed to dominate at the expense of others.

The store fit-out is minimalist in feel and the colour scheme is doggedly neutral, all of which is about providing an unobtrusive backdrop in which the branded 'content' can do its work. This, then, is a store that is a magazine that is a website. It is a mid-market proposition that takes service as its starting point and which uses a partner with online expertise to deliver on the store's promise. As such, it is what shoppers are increasingly expecting of retailers as the lines between online and offline continue to blur. And it has been a long time in the making. Jackson says it is about 14 months since the first ideas for Fabled were mooted and sites in Brighton, Kensington and King's Cross were all considered as part of the process. The fact that it has opened in the new but very high-traffic area that is Tottenham Court Road south, is testimony to the enduring appeal of London's West End.

Whether it proves to be a one-off, as so many online operations that opt for a bricks-and-mortar presence tend to, remains to be seen, but it seems probable that it will punch above its weight in terms of shopper awareness simply by dint of the *Marie Claire* tie-up. Fabled is part of the new generation of retail and we should expect more of its ilk.