

# MAKEOVE



# R MAGIC

*Why retail revamps are so important*

By Marc Redvers



**I**N THE HIGHLY competitive world of modern retail, trends and tastes change at an astonishingly fast pace; storefronts, interior layouts and product displays have to meet the expectations of increasingly demanding and discerning customers. Which is why makeovers have grown to become such a vital part of contemporary retail: reacting quickly and effectively to the often subtle shifts in customer expectations is essential for chains that want to retain market leadership.

Major revamps by A S Watson-owned stores in Europe and Asia have seen the employment of creative new ideas to come up with eye-catching store frontages that instantly hit the spot with 21st century shoppers. Innovative touches for interior displays have ensured that browsing is a comfortable experience in a familiar yet stimulating environment. In Europe, Superdrug, Kruidvat, Trekpleister, Marionnaud and ICI PARIS XL have all recently unveiled new looks that have been positively received by the market. Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, FORTRESS and Watsons HK both introduced new concept stores in the past several months.

"One of the key themes we wanted to instill in all the stores across the board is a comfortable ambience in which our customers can enjoy their shopping trip, purchase products that suit their needs, and leave happy. That way, they will keep coming back to our stores," says Dominic Lai, Group Managing Director of A S Watson Group. "After shopping in the same store for several years, shoppers may feel that the stores are stale or ordinary, especially as other retailers continue to innovate. Thus, the store refurbishment programme's mission was to create a modern, trendy and refreshing look."

"Customers have growing expectations. They look for an overall pleasant shopping experience with a wide selection of the latest products displayed in an easy to find way, with helpful and knowledgeable sales staff available if needed. Quality and value for money are always key. Shopping is a form of entertainment, and we want to make our stores both practical and enjoyable."

The retailers have not been afraid to employ non-traditional techniques to stay sharp and fresh. The Marionnaud chain brought in a renowned French designer, Philippe Kauffmann, who originally studied art and sociology and began his career in cinema and music before moving into architecture and design. Mr Kauffmann has always had eclectic taste, taking on a diverse range of projects that have included creating a new look for renowned fashion company Chanel and upgrading a French racetrack.



**Marionnaud has changed its image to create a modern, trendy and refreshing look.**



ICI PARIS XL AFTER



KRUIDVAT AFTER



FORTRESS AFTER



While making the stores look fresh and modern is the key to success, it is also important to make sure that every customer is happy with the changes.

# One of the key themes was a spacious and comfortable shopping environment



His Marionnaud brief was simple yet challenging: create a new concept, the foundation for new stores that conveyed the message that Marionnaud was a desirable place to shop, associated with feel-good emotions. The makeover also had to send out the message that Marionnaud stores were places where customers could spend time and which held appeal to everyone: young and old, men and women, quick-purchase buyers and those who like to spend time browsing. In addition, stores in different towns had to be instantly recognisable, but with a discernible identity of their own.

"Marionnaud, the leading brand in the selective distribution market in France, is above all a great network of stores, each with its own heritage and personality," says Laurence Paganini, Managing Director of Marionnaud France. "Confronted with increasing demands from its clients, Marionnaud must provide distinctive and qualitative services to its clients and render a certain homogeneity within its store network to affirm its brand positioning and values."

"This major overhaul implies the commitment of all of our employees around Marionnaud's common values. Those values have, since the origin of Marionnaud, built its identity and accessibility, not only due to the network of stores throughout France, but also to the very strong human values such as the relationship between the beauty advisor and our clients. Our staff, of whom we are very proud, are recognised for their expertise. And our commitment to our fundamental values must be perceptible and evident throughout our stores and beauty institutes."

Mr Kauffmann and his team proved up to the task, coming up with novel ideas that merged artistic sensibility with practical application. The core new store theme was one of space, stressing that a Marionnaud visit is a venue where each area can be discovered either alone, with a friend or in the company of a beauty advisor. Brightly-lit tables throughout were designed as "play tables", where people can touch and feel the products in their own time. The discovery-style tables have products arranged in the way a beauty magazine would lay out its pages – with an emphasis on strikingly bright colours to attract attention.

As well as the more tangible aspects of the new look – great customer service and a beauty institute staffed by professionals who know their trade inside out – Marionnaud's vast experience in the area of health and beauty was subtly stressed. The chain is the market leader in France with a total of 1,250 stores in 12 European countries, built up over two decades.

Not that anyone is likely to be unfamiliar with Marionnaud stores since the makeover: the striking signage contains virtually all the colours of the rainbow, banishing neutral palettes to the past. The core colour is plum, while lime green and coral are important yet secondary colours softened by white, a mixture that creates a fluid, dynamic atmosphere.

The use of striking colours was also a key component of the rollout of Superdrug's series of Next Generation stores. The chain, which has 900 stores in the United Kingdom and Ireland, took the decision to use bold pink and shiny silver for its store exteriors, as well as many other new and innovative interior touches.

"The change of the existing Superdrug fascia to a bespoke pink and silver was key to the store's stand out on the high street and from the rest of the estate," says Euan Sutherland, Chief Executive Officer of Superdrug. "New illuminated till points were designed, supporting waterfall displays for impulse purchases."

Superdrug has worked closely with suppliers to create exclusive units, in some cases new table top beauty tables, or by including television screens and light effects within stands. The Next Generation concept has been key in showing suppliers how the Superdrug brand is changing – new cosmetics brands launched exclusively this year include Famous by Sue Moxley, Elite Models, Taxi London and Outdoor Girl.





## In retail there is little time to stand still and take a bow

were all trained at the London College of Fashion and this has become the training model for the Next Generation concept. Every quarter, Superdrug takes its beauty staff for dedicated training from key suppliers to ensure they always know how to recommend what's new.

All the changes seem to be going down well with the customers. Roberta Whitter has been shopping at Superdrug for nearly 10 years. "I usually pop into Superdrug about once a week. I find it easier to browse the new-look store as the aisles are more spacious, so you are not fighting with other customers to get to the same lipstick," says the chartered accountant who enjoys visiting her local spa and bargain-hunting at designer outlet shopping malls. "I also think the shops look fresher with a brighter colour scheme – I love the pink theme. The cosmetics and hair care selection at Superdrug has improved, and I know I will still receive excellent value for money."

Thomas Lau has been a shopper at ICI PARIS XL stores in France since he moved to Europe five years ago. Originally from Hong Kong, he now works for a scientific organisation in Strasbourg, France. "ICI makes me feel very comfortable," he says. "The newly designed counters make browsing and trying the samples much more convenient and easy on the eyes."

A recent makeover by Kruidvat, after the company conducted extensive customer research and feedback, has also proved to be a big hit. Shoppers described the new look as bright, fresh and well organised, with plaudits for the more roomy store layout.

Mr Lai thinks all the makeovers have been successful on a number of different fronts. "Retail stores have several demographics. Simply, there are the younger shoppers, Generation Y, and the mature baby boomers. The stores must cater to both their needs and not isolate one over the other," he says. "Thus, while we are looking to make the stores new and modern, we have to make sure every customer is happy with the changes."

While the store revamps have all gone very well, in retail there is little time to stand still and take a bow. The companies have to keep their finger firmly on the customers' buying pulse – and react accordingly to ever changing trends.

The staff uniform was also revamped alongside the store design. To differentiate Next Generation staff from regular Superdrug store colleagues the store team wears new fashion-focused uniforms which change seasonally. For instance, at launch the team wore an all black outfit accessorised with Superdrug pink beads, bangles and belts from Superdrug's True Spirit jewellery collection.

"The Next Generation concept is more than a new look, it is about the whole experience for customers," says Mr Sutherland. "Our customer satisfaction programme has been designed to gather customer feedback on all our stores including Next Generation stores. Individual store performance and feedback can be isolated, which is why we know our customers like the Next Generation store concept."

"Customer experience was a key consideration for the store design and to emphasise the beauty playground aspect make-over areas were created, along with additional browsing space in the cosmetic aisles. A major part of customer experience is the independent advice given by beauty specialists. This is an important part of the company's strategy as the key driver of growth for Superdrug in the beauty market."

For example, staff at one of the stores in the London area

