

By STEPHEN MAISTER

# Make the most of a small space



Fixtures create a meander through the store as opposed to up and down straight aisles. The cash desk is backed by the bakery / patisserie in the front of the store (the two service areas) which allows shoppers to start their path past the bakery in Zone 1 down the left side of the store.

## How the UK's Waitrose targeted three key shopping missions to launch a totally different-looking convenience store format

Waitrose has traditionally been in the supermarket game, but the launch of its 'Little Waitrose' concept in January has positioned it firmly in the C-store business. By identifying what their customers want and need from a 280m<sup>2</sup> store and designing the space to reflect this demand for convenience, Waitrose has created a unique C-store offering.

### The move to convenience

One of the biggest attractions of C-stores in the UK for supermarket chains is the difficulty in obtaining planning permission for new major stores. Waitrose's competitors – Tesco, Sainsbury's and Marks & Spencer – had been in the R330 bn/year business for a while and it was time for Waitrose to catch up. And they chose to do it differently.

Their first step was to research shoppers and asked them what they wanted in a 280m<sup>2</sup> store. The answers they got were:

- **Simplicity.** Shoppers are tired, in a rush and they don't want the hassle. They want it quick and simple.

- **Fresh.** This was a big win as fresh is already 70% of Waitrose's business.
- **Healthy.** There was an unmet demand for healthy food.
- **Meals.** Few stores in the market inspired shoppers to find what they wanted. They wanted meal solutions.

### Core values of convenience

From this, Waitrose identified the core values they wanted their convenience stores to reflect: Simple, Fresh and Healthy.

The development team now had to wrestle with the problem how to fit everything into the typical 280m<sup>2</sup> trading floor convenience format. You can't, they note, just downscale a supermarket.

From their research they narrowed the possible range down to cater for just three shopping missions:

- Simple, fresh and healthy food to eat during the day.
- Simple, fresh and healthy meal components to take home for dinner.
- Quality everyday essentials and a small, high quality range of gifts.

### Designing the store

The next step was to design the store and its merchandising so that it was easy to shop, easy to choose and easy to check out. To achieve this they set out to integrate floor layout, graphics and colour.

A pilot store floor plan shows the three zones colour coded, as well as the proposed shopper route through the store.



Some of the issues they had to deal with included compressing back of house space to a minimum; streamlining their branch structures; and keeping these small stores in-stock. In contrast to conventional store layout designs, they did not want to force shoppers to shop the whole store where service departments are typically on the perimeter and everything else is arranged into aisles. Instead, they wanted an easy route for each shopping mission that lead shoppers to the cash desk.

They split the store floor into three zones for each of their shopping missions.

**Zone 1:** Quick in and out, in the front of the store for on-the-go food to eat during the day

**Zone 2:** For meals to take home in the evening in the middle of the store

**Zone 3:** Quality, every day essentials at the back of the store or last stop before the checkouts.

This was complemented by bold signs which, together with the use of colour, light fittings and fixtures, would enable shoppers to navigate the store on instinct and find the zones they wanted to shop.

Having developed their design concept and set store standards they proceeded to interpret them in three pilot stores. Each had different shapes and ceiling heights. The first pilot store was in Cambridge, followed by Manchester and the last in Old Brompton Road, London.

Also, Waitrose is a division of the John Lewis Partnership in which all employees are partners. This gives them an edge in the UK market in terms of service and the pride

their staff takes in their stores and work. They saw it as very important to the success of their convenience venture to maintain the partner difference through the way they designed their convenience store format.

Theirs are very different-looking stores. Instead of straight aisles they use a mixture of longer and short fixtures, some set at right angles to one another with spaces in between to create a bit of a meander within the zone. This makes it easy and quick for customers to find the required zone for their shopping mission.

### Other design features

- A service bakery / patisserie in Zone 1, upfront for food-on-the-go and the cash desk are used to present the Waitrose 'served with pride' service edge.
- For every day essential dry groceries, they used high shelving to help take shoppers on this mission to the back of the store. However, Waitrose has strict standards that limits the height of merchandise display to 1.5m, so they repeated the display above that height with plastic replicas of stock.

*They wanted to move away from the 'morgue' like feel of a stainless steel checkout so they added more natural finishes to reflect the idea of a greeting desk; part of their service ethic.*

*Waitrose has been able to create a unique C-store offering by identifying their customers' wants and needs from a 280m<sup>2</sup> store and designing the space to reflect this demand for convenience.*



- They moved away from stainless steel and used more natural finishes. Stainless steel, they say, makes the checkout look more like a morgue table. The checkout, they feel, should not be viewed as a cash desk but rather as a greeting desk – again, part of their service ethic.
- A seat inside the front window and a bike parked outside is part of the standard décor to make the store more welcoming, comfortable and friendlier.
- Fruit has been separated from vegetables. They see fruit more as a snack for any time of the day on-the-go eating, whereas vegetables – more part of the meal – are located about halfway through in Zone 2.

### The results

Customers have given feedback on their shopping experience through e-mail or sms texting – this has been overwhelmingly positive. Still, they found they had more work to do on streamlining branch structures and improving supply to the convenience format. Waitrose plans to open



28 convenience stores this year, adding to the 13 it already operates, with some of them expected to be under the Little Waitrose banner. But, despite being late into the convenience market they also found that there definitely is a place in the market for convenience stores that are 'that little bit different'. **WB**

*Based on a presentation at The Retail Design Conference held on 26 February this year at the Euroshop Trade Fair in Dusseldorf and hosted by the EHI (European Handels / Retail Institute). The joint presentation was made by Anthony Wysome of Waitrose and Martin Campbell Davies of Schweitzer Interstore Design, Waitrose's store design partner of six years standing.*