

# design WEEK



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**Wish you were there?**  
the pros and cons of working abroad

# Voxpop

**Formerly king of the nuts and bolts DIY sector, poor profits are now leading B&Q into soft furnishings, female-friendly cafés and showroom-style room sets. What are the possible effects on a retail brand that diversifies far from its core market?**



This is hardly news – even in 1999 (when I was Head of design at Homebase), B&Q was building room sets and cafés, just like Homebase. B&Q's brand is not limited to 'nuts, bolts & blokes', rather, it is based on providing its customers with affordable and achievable home improvement solutions. As such, this 'diversification' is not brand schizophrenic, I'm not even sure it's brand stretching, unless the room sets include B&B Italia furniture, of course.

***Colum Menzies Lowe, Head of design and human factors, NHS National Patient Safety Agency***



All retailers have to constantly innovate to remain relevant to their ever-changing and demanding customers. The danger is that the core can become marginalised and your customers become confused and, as a result, you cease to be a category destination store. The DIY market is currently going through all the tribulations of most maturing markets, but it probably has more external pressures – such as interest rates and mortgages – than other consumer markets.

***Paul King, Retail director, Vivid Brand***



The secret of successful diversification is to sell new products and services just like you sell your core products. As a customer I understand this, and it's why Tesco can now sell holidays, not just suntan lotion. Retail brands should be honest – are they diversifying or repositioning? If it is the latter, they may have to seek an 'extreme-makeover' rather than lose face.

***Julie Oxberry, Managing director, Household***



Diversification can work – Tesco is the proof of this. The question is, how intelligently can this be achieved? If the offer is an added benefit, it becomes enticing, even entertaining. On the other hand, if it is at the expense of existing products, the consumer becomes irritated, annoyed and looks for alternatives. By their very nature, most DIY customers bring in ongoing repeat business, knowing where everything can be easily found, with good service, good value and without time loss (after all, there is always a job waiting to be done). So as long as they keep coming back, many opportunities can be explored – and that's the key.

***Marcello Minale, Partner, Minale Tattersfield***