



▲ Oasis store in the London shopping centre Westfield: the shop becomes a stage

JOHN RYAN

Market research before design

Having started up just six years ago, the small London-based design consultancy Household has already managed a large number of interesting projects on behalf of high-profile retail companies.



▲ Façade of the Virgin MediaStore



▲ The interior design of Marks & Spencer Home, here in Cardiff

▷ **With its work for customers** like Boots, Christian Louboutin, Yahoo!, Marks & Spencer and Oasis, Household has earned itself a firm place on the UK shopfitting scene - alongside long-established consultancies which have forged a good reputation over years on the market. Not so Household. In a relatively short period of time, its books have filled up with the illustrious names of companies who carry weight in their respective market segments. During its early days, the consultancy consisted just of its three founding partners, managing director

Julie Oxberry, creative director Sarah Page and insights director, Michelle Du-Prât. Household was, effectively, a spin-off from long-established London store design agency 20/20. Initially, the three set up shop in London's East End, close to the financial district, in a corner of the "Tea Building", a large former warehouse that was occupied, in part, by advertising agency Mother. Admittedly, the founder trio counted more than 25 years of experience in store design between them. This at least partly explains how Household was able to achieve turnover of £1



“First we carry out a customer-oriented market survey and then we start developing a new design”

Michelle Du-Prât
Insights director,
Household, London

PORTRAIT

Household

Address: 135 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3BX

Foundation: 2004

Managerial staff: Julie Oxberry, managing director, Sarah Page, creative director, Michelle Du-Prât, insights director

Major retail customers: Boots, ASOS, Asda, Marks & Spencer, Virgin Media, Virgin Atlantic, McArthurGlen, Yahoo, Christian Louboutin

Turnover 2007-2008: £1,693 million (€1,881 million)

million (€1.12 million) and profits of £300,000 (€336,000) in its first year.

Household's management trio explains their success by its "customer-led" approach, which differentiates the agency from its rivals. Looking at things through the customer's eyes is a key part of their creative process. The project for Boots in 2004 is a good illustration of this. The objective was to redesign the facade of the Boots branches to get customers into the store, where they then had to be incited to linger and browse, as posited by Boots' CEO Richard Baker even before the merger with Stefano Pessina's Alliance Unichem in 2006.

Through the customer's eyes

According to his favourite saying "Get in. Get it. Get out." customers had to be enticed into the store so that they could quickly find what they were looking for. Baker also required of Household to do away with the clutter of signage and advertising boards at the point-of-sale. One side of the task was therefore to simplify and clarify the navigation aids, while at the same time they needed to create a package which suited the retailer's entire portfolio and which would work across four store formats: destination stores, high street outlets, local outlets and out-of-town branches.

A prime example of Household's process for Boots is the retailer's Sedley Place store halfway down London's Oxford Street, with its big blue lozenge, a modular solution that can easily be taken to any other location. An interactive "wayfinding" system guides the customer unwaveringly through the store. The signage had to be typical of the department in question but not look overloaded. Overall, the in-store communications had to encourage the customer stop and explore the different departments. Success depended on giving each of the different departments a personality of their own. "We needed something that could be rolled out in other stores too and which would be durable. That's why we chose blue. Then we considered how detailed the system ought to be. It was basically a matter of de-cluttering while getting the message across. That meant simplifying and then working on the details. Of course, we also had to comply with the perennial requirement of every retailer to keep costs to a minimum. And so cardboard was used to avoid 'over-engineering'," as Du-Prât puts it. There were also various customer mindsets to be considered. "If you're male and you spend ages looking for where to pay without finding it, frustration sets in," says Du-Prât. "We literally needed an exit strategy." This was an observation based on a customer survey that Household did before the design work started. Also, the store navigation system had to be on the way but not in the way, visible to customers when needed but not obtrusive. The final design of the navigation system was rolled out across 2,600 stores - a very high-profile project and for Household a solid platform on which to grow its customer list. Among other projects, the agency has worked on the brand image for a planned shopping mall by outlet centre operator McArthurGlen in late 2008 and a design concept for Tesco's shop-in-shop mobile phone offer in 2009. For fashion chain Oasis, Household



▲ Entrance area of Marks & Spencer, Cardiff

developed a whole new store design. Based on the notion of a "fashion whirlwind" – a flexible store fixture and fittings concept with messages "in unexpected places" – the designers created a new format for the store, which opened in December 2008 in London's Westfield centre. Since then, Marks & Spencer, Currys and Virgin Media have all used Household's services to assist in building their brands and expanding into new markets. And Household has even succeeded in making inroads in the virtual world. The consultancy developed a consistent brand image across the different distribution channels and touch points of UK's largest online fashion retailer ASOS.

Flexibility – the path out of recession

The recession has not left Household unscathed, however – like almost every other design practice involved in projects for retailers during the past 12 to 18 months. It even had to lay off some employees, despite relatively bright prospects. For example, Household has just been signed up by French shoe designer Christian Louboutin to create a new store concept. Scheduled to be launched later this year, this marks Household's entry into the luxury segment. Here again, however, the same, proven principle is being applied – first do a consumer-led market study, and only then start working on any new store design. Market research first, design afterwards – Household sees better prospects for success in this strategy than in the widespread post-rationalisation underlying many design options. Also, smaller, more flexible organisations have an edge over competitors. During its brief lifetime, Household has grown, shrunk and is now expanding again. The business operates from three different studios and has a customer list which is the envy of many larger rivals.

Contact:

www.household-design.com



EuroShop

The Global Retail Trade Fair

26.2.–2.3.2011

Düsseldorf, Germany

www.euroshop.de

Ideeller Träger/Sponsor:

EHI Retail Institute®

www.ehi.org

Messe Düsseldorf GmbH
Postfach 101006
40001 Düsseldorf
Germany
Tel. +49(0)211/4560-01
Fax +49(0)211/4560-668
www.messe-duesseldorf.de



Messe
Düsseldorf