



AN IN-STORE EDUCATION

Some retailers are adept at creating spaces that do more than sell products. Samsung's Westfield Stratford store is a prime example. By John Ryan

The idea of stores where you can learn something is not new. On Oxford Street, Selfridges regularly uses parts of its ground floor as pseudo-educational spaces and it often stages large-scale exhibitions in its basement. The same is true of Apple's Genius Bar, and the numerous other shops that seek to educate consumers about their products.

It is in the electronics arena that educational spaces tend to be found, and this is probably where the most can be learnt. New products that do new things are the norm here and very often once a shopper has bought something, it is time for the education process to begin.

Someone who has purchased a device from South Korean electronics giant Samsung might



be inclined to head to the one-off Samsung store at Westfield Stratford. In a former life it was a branch of electronics retailer Micro Anvika, but that disappeared when that enterprise folded and the two-floor Samsung store emerged from the ashes.

If it's a teach-in that's required, that can be taken care of on the first floor – but before that there's the ground floor to consider, where shoppers can find anything from a whizzy-looking, ultra-thin TV to a tablet or a digital camera.

SCREEN TIME

One of the first things shoppers will be aware of when entering this shop – or even before doing so – is the giant LED screen featuring the



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The combination of natural daylight and high-definition screens makes it hard not to look



Low-level seating is used to create an informal, friendly atmosphere

Samsung logo that occupies the triple-height space at the front. This can be seen through the store's glass frontage and shines out as a beacon for those leaving the indoor part of the mall and heading along the external 'street' that defines the perimeter of the shopping centre's west side.

Once the logo is out of the way, however, it's the TVs that are the most eye-catching, if only because of their size and the manner in which they occupy the whole of the left-hand side of the shop. At the front, on its own standalone unit, is a particularly large TV and the combination of natural daylight and high-definition screens makes it hard not to look.

Once this has been clocked, there's the rest

of the floor to consider. This is both large and spacious. The eye is drawn to the back of the space by another Samsung logo, this time fronted by the sales counter.

Between that and the front of the shop there are brushed metal tables or, more accurately, plinths topped by flat metal surfaces on which the bulk of the hardware is positioned. The sleek metal plinths serve, among other things, to conceal the cabling that is required to power the equipment on display. Standard stuff perhaps, but it would be quite easy not to be aware of any of this so well executed are the finishes.

The same is true of the palette of materials that has been deployed. Things have been kept very simple, with the cream terrazzo





The ground floor includes a table for children to play with Samsung tablets

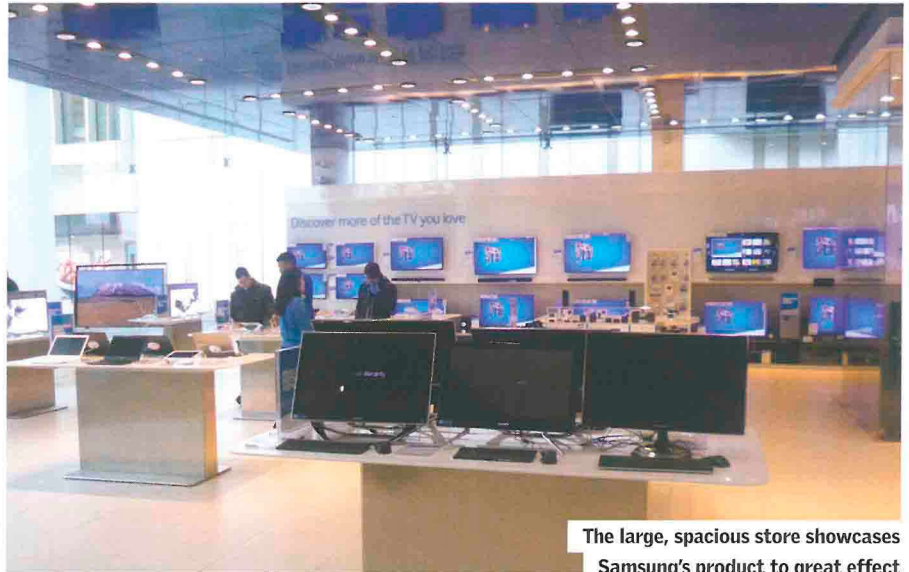
tiling and the metal tables being coupled with white walls and more screens at the back of the shop showing happy Samsung users. The ambient lighting is subdued and spotlights in the blue ceiling raft accent individual areas, rather than flooding the whole with light.

Worth noting too is the mini-tablet table at the front of the shop. This has four small chairs and an equally diminutive table, where children can be entertained by more Samsung products – although it does all look a mite exposed in the context of this very spacious floor.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Here comes the science bit. Heading up to the first floor, which takes the form of an enclosed mezzanine, via the heavily designed steel staircase, the shopper emerges into the ‘Smart School’, an area with comfy sofas and low tables. This is where classes on what can be found downstairs are given and where free one-on-one tutorials can be booked for those who really need in-depth knowledge.

The floor also carries the service desk – where shoppers go when things go wrong – and a range of accessories. Curiously, just beyond the stairs and in a recessed area before the rest



The large, spacious store showcases Samsung's product to great effect



This is an engaging space and there were more customers on this floor than in the main product space downstairs

of the floor is reached, there is a kitchen shop with a fridge, microwave and oven, among other items. Presumably, this is to inform the ill-informed that Samsung is about more than consumer electronics and its universe also stretches to white goods. It does seem a little odd, however, and it was certainly the case that on the day of visiting, it was not being given the once-over by visitors.

A graphic on the white wall at the rear urges shoppers and those seeking knowledge to “join us here to discover more”. There is something Apple-like about this as a form of address and the notion of a school of acolytes has a similar appeal. That said, this is an engaging space and there were actually more customers on this floor than in the main product space downstairs.

Clearly, this is a showpiece for a company whose products one might normally expect to find in host retailers’ showrooms. It is also a fine instance of a brand circumventing the normal retail channels and coming up with something that is rather better than what some of its retail rivals seem happy to provide.

Whether this is a revenue generator, like an Apple store, or whether it is just about keeping shoppers in the Samsung loop, this store is hard to ignore. From Westfield’s perspective, it also has the considerable merit of acting, along with the large Marks & Spencer next door, as a shop that draws people to the development’s wide-open spaces. Samsung could do worse than creating a rolled-out template from what it has done in this location. ●



The kitchen area of the store highlights Samsung's range of appliances