



# JD Sports races into the future

The retailer has revamped its Trafford Centre store in Manchester to create a branch that points the way forward for the group. John Ryan reports

**J**D Sports Fashion has been busy lately. From its new Ultimate Outdoors store in Preston to the Open format that has just seen the light of day in Hanley, Staffordshire, this looks like a retail outfit in a hurry. But what of the core JD Sports chain? To understand where this retailer is headed, the best thing to do is take a trip to Manchester's Trafford Centre.

On the penultimate Saturday in August, this refurbished store became at one fell swoop a flagship for the retailer. In place of what was once a branch of JD Sports, a King of Trainers unit and a standalone Adidas store, there is now a single, enlarged JD Sports shop. During the four-month refit a temporary JD Sports store opened in a small unit about a minute's walk away.

Now the revamped space, boasting a ground floor and a mezzanine, is open to shoppers. The first thing that the casual visitor will probably observe, other than the mesh-clad yellow pillars at the entrance, is a large sign. Formed of white neon tubes against a black background and set high above the ground floor is the message "the undisputed king of trainers".

It's a theme that is mirrored in various forms around the store, with the words "unrivalled" and "pedigree" being typical of the ethos that is apparent all over the shop. And around the showpiece sign there is a conveyor belt of training shoes, forever on the move and impossible to go unnoticed by shoppers.

All this, however, is

little more than cosmetic attention-grabbing. The real point about what has been done here is the manner in which design, technology and stock have been combined to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

#### On trial

Stephen White, group marketing director at JD Sports Fashion, says: "We've got to try things out. There are things in here that we know we may not need in this store, but which we have to try for use in other branches."

There is more technology in the Trafford Centre branch than any other JD store. Among other things this means iBeacons, iPads and eight kiosks through which shoppers can access the entire JD range. There are also two large touchscreens that have been created by combining standard screens and coating them with a copper-wire-impregnated film (a much cheaper solution, according to a member of the JD tech team).

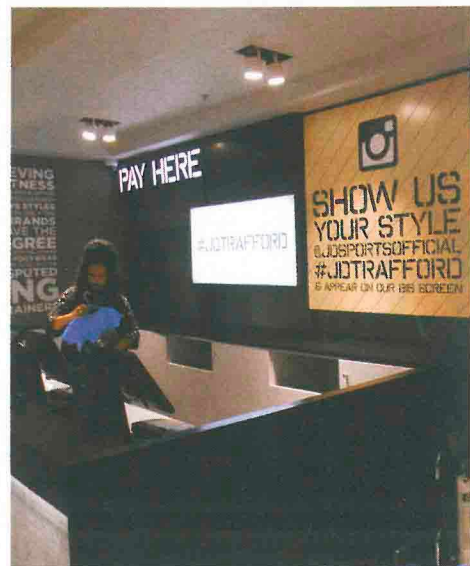
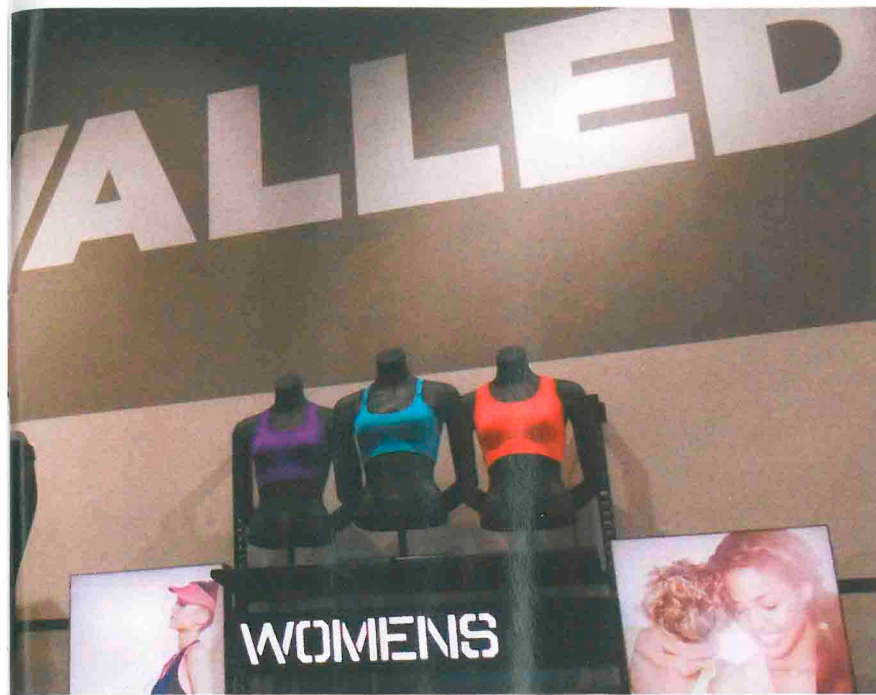
Whatever the mechanics the touchscreens work well and can be used to shop for anything that might not be available in-store. They are also another eye-catcher and, presumably, owing to the lower than normal cost, should be replicable in further JD locations.

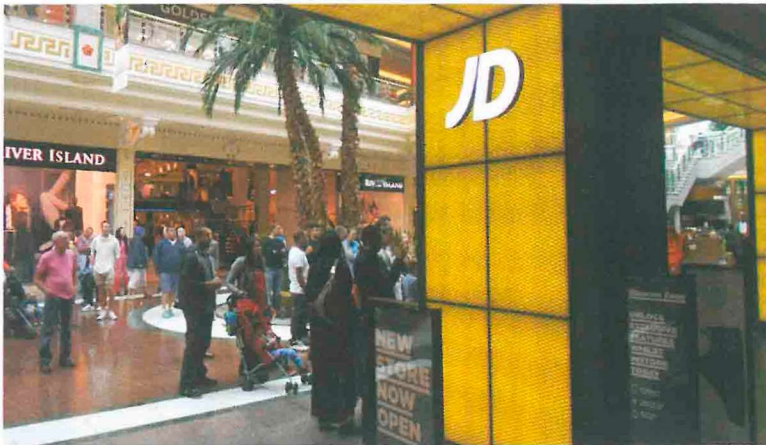
#### JD SPORTS, TRAFFORD CENTRE

**Design** Brinkworth  
**Shoe display equipment** Visplay  
**Size** 9,000 sq ft  
**Number of floors** Two – ground and large mezzanine  
**Opened** August 23  
**Ambience** Commercial hi-tech

The iBeacons enable items to be scanned by shoppers on their smartphones as they make their way around the store; this saves time at the checkout because staff don't need to scan the items themselves. In theory, the same technology could allow shoppers to make cashless transactions anywhere in







the store but, as a member of staff points out, given that typically around 50% of sales in a JD store are paid for with cash (the retailer's core demographic is very young), the idea might not be viable in practice.

### Marketing tool

Such innovation, however, does bring into sharp focus the fact that this is a test-bed store and a flagship for the chain. It has to be. The Trafford Centre is one of the more expensive places in which to set up shop: all of the space has to be sweated, as White remarks, pointing out that for many of the big brands the shops are about marketing in addition to retailing. "We have to take money as well, so it's about density too," he says.

The ground floor is dedicated to clothing: sports, fashion and a combination of the two, and the graphics package emphasises the broad range of brands that are on offer from Adidas to Lacoste.

At the back of the floor there are the fitting rooms and the checkouts. The fitting rooms are fronted by light-boxes and a mirrored wall, but it is at the tills where another element of this shop comes to the fore – the links with social media.

Shoppers are encouraged to tweet about the store using the hashtag #JDTRAFFORD and there are signs throughout the outlet stating "We'll keep you posted", enjoining people to visit the retailer's Facebook page.

And so to the first floor, home to the largest footwear offer in the chain. As well as all the styles on show there is seating for waiting customers, light-boxes, touchscreens and overhead monitors that let shoppers track the progress of the trainer they have selected as it is collected from the stockroom. As well as helping to take some of the agony out of waiting, the monitors also make the process more efficient.

Formerly, shoes were ordered from the stockroom via two-way radios. Now staff and customers can review the progress of their orders on screens, allowing staff to concentrate on selling and keeping shoppers happy.

The mid-shop display equipment on this level is worth a mention as well. Composed of black metal mesh, it strikes a contemporary note and allows better views through the space than might be the case with solid surfaces.

### Point of difference

A big step forward then for the 'King of Trainers', and it's easy to see large parts of what is being tried out in this store being taken to other locations. But will these innovations add to what is already in place in JD stores and equate to incremental sales?

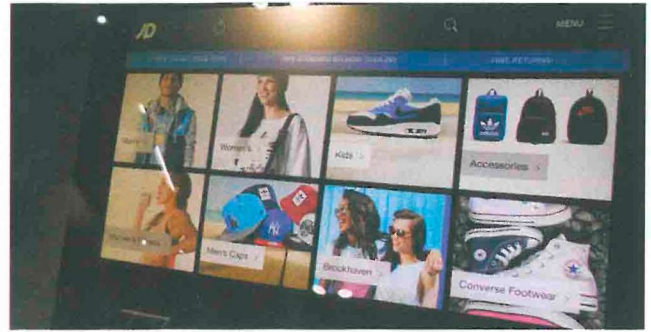
White and Wayne Davies, UK retail and international operation director at JD, seem pleased. "The first thing we did was to go out and see what others were doing in fashion and then to try to work out how we could adapt that to make it work here," says White.

Davies makes the point that working on the store with design consultancy Brinkworth has been a collaborative process and that many of those involved have come from parts of the retailer outside the UK.

Both are also keen to highlight the gender mix of the customers in the store – almost as many women as men are taking a look around.

On this basis, it seems safe to assume that what is on view in the Trafford Centre will soon be incorporated across the retailer in the UK and beyond.

This looks like a retailer that is in tune with its market and one that is putting a suitable distance between what it does and the discount offer of its competitor Sports Direct.



To read more stores features go to [retail-week.com/stores](http://retail-week.com/stores)