



EAT, PRAY, *Slay*

Previously online-only U.K. retailer Missguided breaks all the rules in its debut brick-and-mortar London store.

By John Ryan, European Editor

WHAT IS A RETAILER TO DO IF IT HAS NO EXPERIENCE OPERATING in a mall – or any other physical shopping environment, for that matter? What if all it knows are orders placed by customers typing a few keystrokes and clicking the “purchase” button?

This was the biggest challenge facing online fashion outfit Missguided (Manchester, U.K.) when it set out to open a store in the Westfield Stratford shopping center in East London. Until the decision was made last year, Missguided – founded in 2009 – had been a pure-play online fashion retailer.

In creating the brand’s first physical environment, “the ambition was to create an immersive experience that’s fun and has an element of the unexpected, with social integration through Insta-



#aspirational

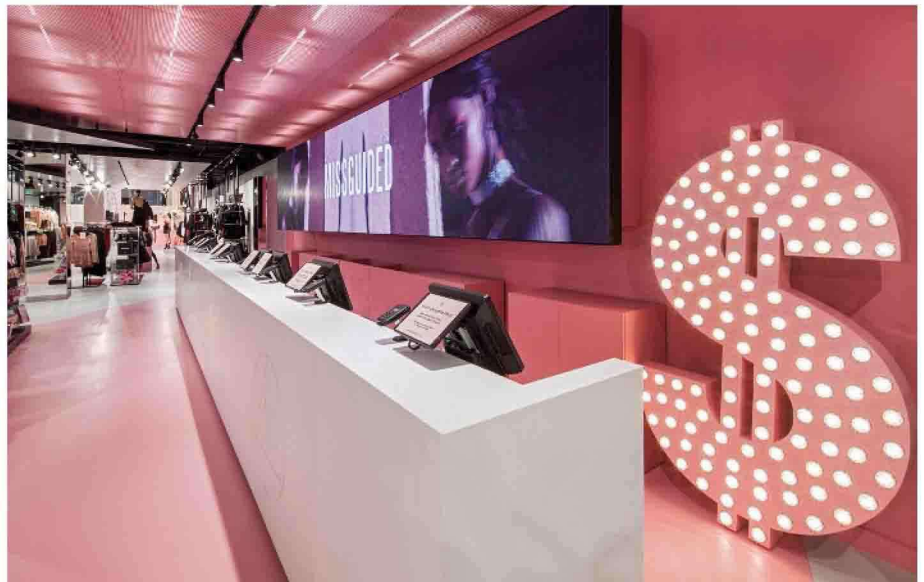
*Humorous hashtags
abound, sharable
moments are suggested
for Missguided's social
media-savvy shoppers.*



grammable moments across the store,” says Juan Diaz Del Castillo, design team leader at Dalziel and Pow (London), the firm tasked with designing the project. “Missguided is really bold and brave, and with its first store, we wanted to challenge what ‘retail’ is about and do something completely different that could be [uniquely] Missguided.”

The target market for this store is the young, knowledgeable and independent female consumer. The space comprises a wide and deep ground floor and a slightly smaller mezzanine level above. Shoppers wandering into the store are presented with a wide-open, two-floor, pastel pink space that is something of a lesson in anarchic layouts and merchandising techniques. “Because there are no preconceptions about how to shop at a Missguided store, we didn’t need to follow traditional structures or conventions,” says Del Castillo. “The customer journey is free-flowing: There are no walkways or defined paths; it’s about exploring and discovering.”

Groups of sassy mannequins are positioned on and around a large, pink monster truck, next to a stack of “frosted doughnut” tires, as well as standing on small platforms on either side of the entrance. And in order to solidify the message that the store is not for the fashion faint-of-heart, lightboxes strung up on the perimeter feature lipstick kiss prints and slogans, such as “EAT PRAY SLAY” and “make the naughty list this year.”



Del Castillo says that while the interior might appear almost random in terms of merchandising, there is a logic to the presentation: “The layout is based around the idea of flexible sets that can be changed to keep the customer journey fresh and varied – there’s always something new to discover.” Placing fitting rooms at the front of the store on the mezzanine level was key to the design, he says. “[It’s] a brave move that works well for the Missguided customer and puts service and social at the heart of the concept.”

TOP Custom realistic mannequins with chic wig styles and bold makeup relate to Missguided’s trendsetting clientele.

ABOVE Wide, horizontal digital signage behind the cashwrap delivers dynamic, up-to-date and relevant content to shoppers.



The retailer has labeled the store “the extrovert on the high street,” and it’s easy to understand why. And perhaps for this reason, it follows few conventional rules, right down to the Gobo projection on the floor, which Del Castillo says serves as the principal in-store navigational aid.

The store almost evokes the sense of a deconstructed website where images and messages continuously flash at the onlooker. In this way, the designers have established a tangible version of the brand’s online avatar, giving it substance and physicality.

The outcome to date has been highly positive, and a second location is slated to open this summer in the Bluewater shopping mall, a few miles southeast of London, to be followed by a raft of new stores opening in other major U.K. cities later this year.

Managing customer expectations is the norm for a first location for an online-only retailer, and it’s even more important when the brand is so well-known to its customer base in another format. In the hard-edged world of conventional retail, Missguided fulfills its online promise. ▴

ABOVE Irreverent phrases and playful imagery evoke an aspirational feel for the store’s millennial and Gen Z audience.

RIGHT The store breaks with convention in its navigational paths, encouraging exploration and discovery.

