

STORES

A top-flight electricals offer

Dixons' new travel store in Heathrow's Terminal 3 aims to be gender-neutral and premium. John Ryan pays the airport outlet a visit



The virtual reality play area



The eye-catching red French bulldog surrounded by headphones

Putting a store into an airport is a different business from operating on a high street. Rents are generally higher, browsing time is almost certainly more limited and large items are less likely to sell as they will not be carried onboard – which is still where most purchases are going to be taken.

It is also worth noting that there are substantial differences between both customers and their spending power in different airports.

As Heidi Woodhouse, managing director of Dixons Travel, notes: "There's a more affluent shopper in [Heathrow's] Terminal 3 and so we wanted to give our new store a more premium feel."

The store in question is a 2,100 sq ft unit in a Heathrow terminal that is dominated by long-haul flights and from which many business-class passengers begin their (non-British Airways) journeys.

As such, it is very different from regional airports catering predominantly for tourists, a fact confirmed when Woodhouse says that among other things the store targets shoppers with salaries in excess of £100,000.

Premium feel

But what does all of this mean from an in-store perspective? The shop is actually a symmetrical box with one open side, giving passing shoppers a view more or less from front to back.

The elongated goalpost that forms the entrance is internally lit and has a light beige pattern on it with the Dixons logo delineated in an unobtrusive black.

This is certainly more premium in feel than a standard Currys PC World Carphone Warehouse store, and while the fascia is eye-catching, it does not shout.

It is also quite hard not to look into the store, owing to the fact that the upper perimeter is

composed of screens along its entire length, around which content scrolls.

Woodhouse says that this works well for promotional purposes, as product information and images can be sent around the store and then come to rest above the perimeter module, where the specific item or brand is housed.

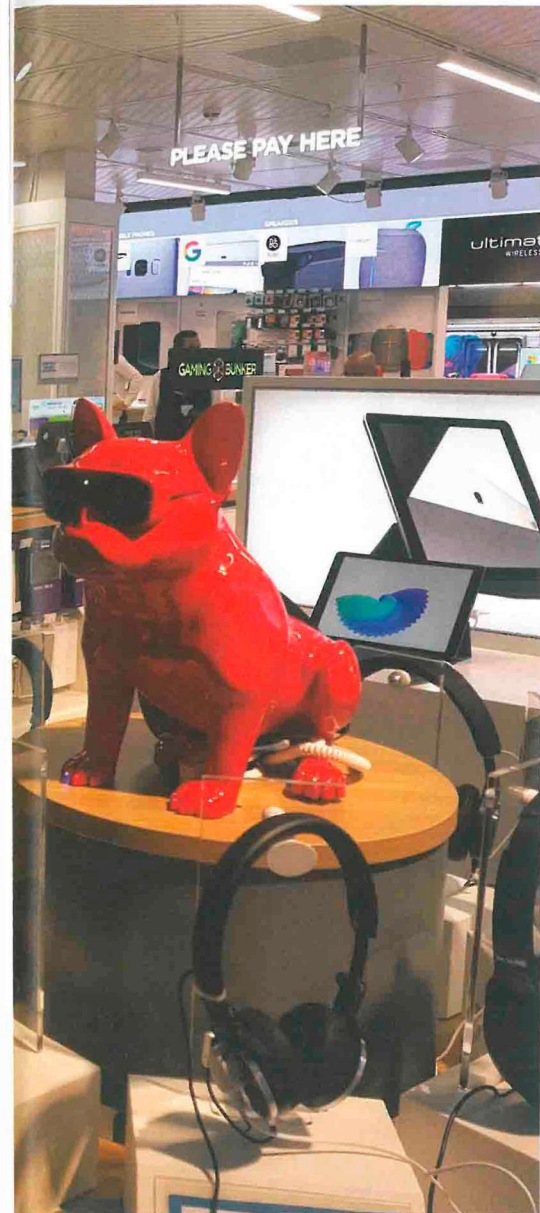
Closer to the entrance, however, the line of sight will probably alight on the red lacquered sunglasses-clad French bulldog that sits on a plinth surrounded by headphones.

This is among the initial things the visitor will encounter, and with prices on this display ranging from £34.96 for a pair of Sony headphones to £331 for Bang & Olufsen bins, there is something for most well-heeled shoppers.

Something extra

The bulldog is symptomatic of much that has been done across this interior – it is about

See pictures of Zara's
first babywear store
Retail-Week.com/Zara-Baby



Dixons Travel Heathrow Terminal 3

What makes it different?

- Upper perimeter promotional screens with flowing content
- Experience is central to all displays
- The product mix has been altered to appeal to women as well as men
- The look and feel of the store is designed to be gender-neutral
- Time of day merchandising can be a reality thanks to the use of screens



There's a more affluent shopper in T3 and so we wanted to give our store a more premium feel Heidi Woodhouse, Dixons Travel

adding a little extra to what might otherwise be a perfectly functional, if a little mundane, series of product vignettes.

Woodhouse says when considering the design for the store, three questions were uppermost: "We're competing with many others and so we asked 'how do you make a store exciting and

how do you bring it up to date?' The other thing is 'how do we make it gender-neutral?'"

Looking around the rest of the store, what is apparent is that this is a series of experiences, all of which take the products on offer as their starting point.

This means a virtual reality play area with the headsets on display ready to be test-driven, a FitBit space, complete with a screen showing fitness game Workplace Race, and live digital devices wherever the eye settles.

Gender-neutrality

The other point about this store is its gender-neutral credentials.

Superficially, there are more products that are likely to be used by women than in similar stores, with pride of place going to the Dyson hairdryers, although mention should also be made of Foreo's electronic skincare products.

There is rather more to making a store less overtly masculine than putting in a few SKUs that will appeal to women. Materials such as Corian, a herringbone floor treatment first piloted in Stratford, and spot lighting and 'mood' ambient lighting, on the pillars, all contribute to a more gender-neutral environment

Chris Bright, design services director at Dixons Carphone, says this is a "concept store" and that "we'll look to take aspects of what has been done elsewhere, where we can".

Still to come are digital shelf-edge tickets, which should help with time-limited promotions and ongoing brand involvement.

Woodhouse says the perimeter screens will mean the store can be tailored to reflect flights at a particular time of the day: "50% of our customers will be international, so we have to look at how we appeal to them."

It does look as if Dixons Travel has covered most of its upscale bases. **RW**