

# RetailWeek

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## World Cup no open goal for retailers in tough climate

Lower footfall and margin impact from promotions will create fiercely competitive trading conditions

BY LISA BERWIN

Retailers will have to pull out all the stops to benefit from a World Cup sales boost as the tournament prepares to kick off in South Africa next week.

Total sales are expected to grow by around £900m in the second quarter, when the tournament falls. Although that is up 1.3% on last year, according to retail research house Verdict, it is less than the £2.1bn sales rise enjoyed by retailers in the equivalent 2006 World Cup quarter.

Verdict retail analyst Joseph Robinson said retailers would need to work for sales during the contest, which takes place in a tougher economic climate than in 2006.

He said: "An upturn in sales will be reliant on driving volume, with promotional activity having a marked impact on margins.

"Some sectors are set to be adversely impacted due to the combination of a decline in footfall on the high street and disposable income being channelled elsewhere."



Electricals is set to gain, with this being the first World Cup with HDTVs

Grocers are expected to achieve the biggest increase in sales, helped by convenience formats well placed to satisfy customer demand and alcohol sales forecast to advance 2.4%.

Sports retailers should do well. JJB Sports and Sports Direct will be hoping for a sales fillip, particularly if England make it into the later rounds.

Sports Direct will highlight its

World Cup offers in a new round of TV advertising starting this weekend, after piloting TV ads for the first time earlier this year.

The electricals sector is also in line for a sales bonanza. Volumes are expected to peak in the World Cup quarter as sales of goods such as TVs are pulled forward. This will be the first World Cup to be broadcast in high definition, and many customers are expected to upgrade their sets.

Evidence of that was seen at Comet last weekend. Sales of TVs rocketed 73% year on year, the retailer said.

But Verdict expects DIY projects to be put on the back-burner during the competition as men spend more time in front of the TV. Garden products should show growth if the weather is good, as people host barbecues and World Cup parties.

Expenditure in the second quarter is expected to drop 1.1% for DIY products, while an increase of 1% is forecast for the gardening sector.

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## Monsoon guns for 1,000 stores in China push

BY EVE OXBERRY

Womenswear retailer Monsoon is understood to be plotting a roll-out of as many as 1,000 stores in China within the next five years.

Monsoon, which made its debut in China in 2008 and at present has nine stores there, was said by sources familiar with the situation already to be planning hundreds more shops

and further growth down the line.

A Monsoon spokesman confirmed the retailer intends to expand in China through a subsidiary but would not comment on planned store numbers.

It is understood that the shops will carry both clothing and accessories under the Monsoon and Accessorize brands. The roll-out will be overseen

by Monsoon's regional controller for the Far East, Dan Poppleton.

The ambitious plans are the latest international venture for Monsoon, which is opening five stores in the US this year and has continued to expand globally, notably in Russia and the Middle East.

China is a key growth market for fashion retailers. Marks & Spencer,

Mango and Hugo Boss are among those plotting expansion there.

Accounts posted at Companies House this week showed Monsoon made sales of £540m and pre-tax profits of £27.9m in the year to August 29, 2009, against sales of £632m and profit of £54.6m in the non-comparable 66-week period to August 30, 2008.

# Stamp of authority

A revamp of stamp retailer Stanley Gibbons' London flagship creates a modern space for a slightly old-fashioned pastime. John Ryan learns what the new-look store offers the 21st century collector

For a particular group of people, the address 221B Baker Street means only one thing: Sherlock Holmes. This is where the violin-playing, pipe-smoking detective and logician spent quality time telling Dr Watson that, in effect, he wasn't very bright. For another set, 399 Strand holds the same power – except that in this case stamps, rather than sleuthing, are what spring to mind.

This is the address of Stanley Gibbons. If this still doesn't ring any bells, then you probably aren't male, over 40, or especially keen on collecting things. The Stanley Gibbons flagship – for this is what resides at 399 Strand – is probably the global epicentre of philately.

This is where you come if you are a stamp collector in search of any of the stamp specimens that have been used in Great Britain or its Commonwealth since Sir Rowland Hill established the Royal Mail in 1840.

There has been a Stanley Gibbons shop in the area for more than 100 of the 170 years since the invention of the pre-paid postage stamp. As such, the current store is a landmark in this part of London, but on the admission of Richard Purkis, a Stanley Gibbons director, it was looking a little "tired", having last had a makeover in 1990.

One of the people involved in that store redesign was John Clarke. 20 years later, as creative director at Experience Development Partnership (XDP), he has just finished working with Purkis on updating the store once more, and making it relevant to the modern stamp collector.

The refurbishment was timed to coincide with the London 2010 International Stamp Exhibition (which took place last month), an event that occurs only once a decade – and that attracts 50,000 stamp enthusiasts to the capital, according to Purkis.

Purkis also points out that the world of stamp collecting has changed quite a bit since 1990 and that the store needed to reflect this. "The web has changed

**STANLEY GIBBONS, 399 STRAND**  
**Reopened** April  
**Size** Selling area (including first-floor client rooms): 5,745 sq ft  
**Number of floors** Three  
**Design** Experience Development Partnership (XDP)  
**Fit-out time** Eight weeks  
**Shopfitting** Newman Scott  
**Most outstanding feature** Mid-shop web portal  
**Stanley Gibbons** Founded 1856

stamp collecting," he says, noting that in its previous manifestation, stamp album selling was one of the store's principal activities.

It still offers stamp albums, but there is a lot more besides. A visitor returning to this store would, with the exception of the "heritage" area at the rear of the ground floor, be hard pushed to recognise the interior. However, the exterior that greets the passing philatelist is a familiar one – the fascia has been tweaked, but the bulk of the £715,000 budget for the project has been reserved for the interior.

It is now easier to see into the shop from the street as the window has been enlarged. Sightlines into the store, therefore, should certainly help to ensure that stamp collectors or interested passers-by step across the threshold rather than going to the somewhat scruffier-looking rival stamp shop across the street.

Once inside, the first thing that greets the shopper is a reception desk. This makes the Stanley Gibbons customer experience rather different from that found in a standard shop. But it is in keeping with the business's priorities of cossetting and looking after the needs of investors, specialist collectors and the man in the street who wants his stamp collection valued.

## Signed, sealed, delivered

Looking into the store from this vantage point, the space is divided into two parts. To the right is the stamp side of the business, while on the left is an area, behind a floor-to-ceiling glass screen, called Frasers Autographs. This is a division of the Stanley Gibbons Group and, just as the stamp side of the business is the UK's largest philatelic concern, this is the biggest autograph sales company in the country.

With a page from a school book owned by Buddy Holly, something signed by Elvis and a note from Walt Disney all on view, it doesn't take long to work out why the glass screens are



**"A PAGE FROM A SCHOOL BOOK OWNED BY BUDDY HOLLY, SOMETHING SIGNED BY ELVIS AND A NOTE FROM WALT DISNEY ARE ALL ON VIEW"**

Clockwise from top: a reception desk welcomes shoppers; the Frasers Autographs section; the store's outer window has been enlarged, making it easier to see in; a reception area on the first floor leads to the meeting room; the 'heritage' area remains untouched



there. As well as providing security, though, the screens help to create a museum-like feel to the display.

The autographs are mounted on boards behind the glass, supported on parallel rails set into the floor, meaning that depth as well as width has been brought to the display.

If you're interested, the real money is actually in the boardroom on the first floor, where upwards of £40,000 will secure the signature of Henry VIII or Elizabeth I – making 20th century celebrities appear small fry.

## The stamp bibles

Back on the ground floor, the right-hand side of the shop beyond the reception is all about stamps, and the first element that the visitor encounters is a series of black shelves laden with books. These are stamp catalogues, used by many in the trade as the bibles with which they make valuations of individual stamps.

Back in the day, a single bulky Stanley Gibbons catalogue – or at the most, two – was sufficient to house more or less all the stamps that had been issued. However, with ever-increasing numbers of stamp sets being issued around the world, these catalogues have been split into specific regions of the world.

You can browse the shelves filled with catalogues of British stamps, or look through those covering the Commonwealth, and finally there are shelves marked "World" and "Stamps of the world" (how you divide the latter two is not entirely clear).



## "THE SHOP ACTS AS A GREAT INTRODUCER TO STAMPS"

Richard Purkis,  
Stanley Gibbons

The point is that if you're a collector of, say, stamps from the Balkans, there will be a catalogue waiting for you, colour-coded at both shelf and publication level, for ease of selection. Purkis says: "The shop is a great part of the business. Not only do we sell items, but it acts as a great introducer to stamps and autographs."

Introductions over, it's time to investigate the store's deeper recesses. Immediately beyond the autograph and stamp screens is a circular, white mid-shop fixture with computer monitors on it. Words such as "Global philatelic portal" and "Autograph search" leap out at the onlooker from the plinth the computers stand on, inviting them to browse. Purkis sees this element as a vital link between 399 Strand and the internet. To either side, internally illuminated glass cases are filled with expensive and generally Victorian stamps.

Finally, at the back of the shop is the

**Above: in-store computers invite visitors to browse stamp-related sites; left: clear sightlines entice shoppers into the shop**

"heritage" area, filled with dark wood counters, red stock books and serious-looking staff. This part of the shop hasn't been touched, aside from some gentle restoration, and it's where collectors come to buy or sell specific items. There are more than 3m stamps in the shop, meaning that careful, accurate administration and storage are vital to the business.

Now head downstairs and the part of the enterprise that used to characterise the store is still present: this is where visitors head to buy albums, stamp hinges, tweezers and magnifying glasses. There is a distinctly utilitarian air to this part of the shop – a world away from the relative glamour of the ground floor. It serves, to an extent, as a reminder of how things used to be before the makeover was completed in April. Upstairs is a boardroom-cum-client meeting room, with more autographs lining its walls.

There is a whiff of yesteryear about stamp collecting, but this shop manages to take a schoolboy hobby that may have been long forgotten and turn it into something with relevance to contemporary collectors.

Even if stamp collecting has never been your thing, this store is still worth a visit – simply as an object lesson in taking multiple small items and turning them into pieces worthy of perusal and possibly purchase. It's almost exciting.