



Somerfield plc choose Autodesk® Revit® to help the development of their new stores

Double digit growth for 'concept' stores

When JH Mills opened his first grocery store in Bristol in 1875, did he know that he had sown a seed that was to grow into **Somerfield plc**, one of the biggest names in UK retailing? For the company now has over 1,300 Somerfield and Kwik Save stores and records over 12 million customer visits every week. It is one of the biggest employers in retailing with 56,000 staff. Somerfield stocks over 6,000 own label products and has a commitment to regional sourcing with over 1,000 local lines in local stores. It carries more than 65 different fresh organic lines, over 300 other organic products and has removed all genetically modified ingredients from its own label foods. According to consumer purchase information supplied by AC Nielsen Homescan™, the global market research company, in the 52 weeks to December 1st 2001, Somerfield and Kwik Save had a 6.8% share of the total grocery market. Two years ago, the company launched a major refurbishment programme. Intended as a blueprint for the future shape of the business, the 'concept' store programme introduced a new, modernised and clearly recognisable signature image for many of the company's premises. Somerfield re-engineered its product ranges and promotions, and invested heavily to provide an attractive and trusted shopping environment for its customers, using Autodesk Revit to help with the task. The approach clearly worked; on a like-for-like basis, double digit sales growth has been achieved at refitted Somerfield stores.



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The new Somerfield style

Store design encompasses a number of disciplines: Retail Planning refers to the provision of detailed 2D working drawings for store contractors; Space Planning refers to the analytical and statistical task of macro space allocation of category footages within a supermarket and Concept Development is concerned with the overall look of the completed stores. David Reade is one of four Concept Development Managers at Somerfield reporting to the Concept Development Controller. David and his colleagues ensure the successful design and implementation of the 'concept' store programme across the country. David explains, "We design the model store layouts and determine the best use of store space, deciding the amount of chill space and the amount of ambient space, the space layout and the wall, ceiling and floor treatments and signage in line with the new Somerfield style." David adds, "This was a new thrust in our business. A decision had been made to invest in the Somerfield and Kwik Save brands. We needed to invest in new equipment such as lighting, chill cabinets, freezers and shelving anyway, so we decided at the same time to invest in the whole store appearance. We developed a new fascia brand, a new logo and new colour schemes. With Revit, we defined them, prototyped them and put them into the stores, right, first time."

Fast, capable and affordable

Developing the stores in this way was critical to the business. The team had to eliminate all risk of delay and changes that could put pressure on store reopening and hence store revenue. They needed to see what the stores would look like, in advance of the redevelopment work. David used AutoCAD® to produce a number of models to illustrate the potential of 3D. However, not all CAD packages are intuitive to use in 3D and it was clear that it would be difficult to represent some of the complicated pieces of equipment. David notes, "I was aware of some of the solutions that were available, but had not heard of Revit. I had considered AutoCAD and 3ds max™ but that choice would have meant more expenditure and more training. What really brought Revit into the equation was a call from Autodesk just at the right time, when the team was stretched and under pressure. We were just considering what we could use for the job and the phone rang!" The call was closely followed by a demonstration. David comments, "Revit looked very good. I could see that it was fast, capable and affordable. It was easy to demonstrate and looked as though it would save us time. I went along to an exhibition in London and met other Revit users. There were many different organisations using it in different ways. Did I have any caveats? No, none that I can remember."



Vastly better visualisations

At a second demonstration, Revit was shown to be capable of everything that Neil Foord, the Concept Development Controller, required. Revit was installed in 2001 and David Reade records how easy it was to use. He says, "We knew we could recreate the stores themselves very quickly and easily. We just imported the 2D floor plans from AutoCAD and snapped more or less automatically round the walls we wanted. We then worked totally in Revit. It was as simple as that. Then we populated the model with the equipment we planned to use. Rather than use the equipment manufacturer's own CAD models, we decided to draw every piece of the equipment as part of the training. That meant we had everything in place and could quickly populate any store we worked on. Revit produced vastly better visualisations than we were getting previously." In terms of training, David adds, "For us, two days was sufficient because we were already familiar with CAD software."

Just like shelling peas

Revit was used initially on the refit of the Shoreham store in Sussex. As a control, before work at the site began, the delicatessen counter was modelled in Revit, as were the surrounding areas, complete with finishes and colours. Anything that was to go into the store was included. The resulting visualisations were shown to the directors and any outstanding issues resolved. The rendered model was in fact very close in appearance to the finished store. However, the main test came with the development of the Winchester store. This 9,000 ft² unit had every element of 'concept' store thinking and every piece of 'concept' store equipment in it. If Revit was going to be stretched, it would be stretched on this project. A large number of elevations were produced and a range of views and walk-throughs were generated. David Reade says, "The Shoreham store was where we put our training to the test, but Winchester is where we really went to town. We generated a lot of output that was well received and well used. We have compared the Revit visualisations with photographs of the completed Beers Wines and Spirits area. They too, are remarkably close to each other. Of course, we did not model the actual merchandise, but that is the only discernable difference." Revit was then used on the refurbishment of six London stores, all different and all existing Kwik Save stores that were to be converted to Somerfield stores. Problem bulkheads, beams and difficult sales floor areas were identified during a series of site visits.

Using Revit, the implementation teams were then provided with detailed elevations. David notes, "We were able to show the site team every wall and all the equipment. We were able to show exactly what we wanted: wall treatments, text and graphics, exact wall colours, everything. That level of information was very well received. There were over 100 stores to be refurbished, so it became just like shelling peas."

Communicating concepts and detail

David Reade finds that Revit has enabled fast decision-making. He continues, "I may have the site foreman at the end of the phone asking for urgent resolution of a problem. It could be something that had not been considered, a column or a bulkhead that looked straightforward on the 2D site plan, for example. You can go into Revit, sort the problem and send a new visualisation in Adobe® pdf format by e-mail, immediately. It saves so much panic and heartache." David's colleagues have a view, too. John Potter, also a Concept Development Manager, does not use Revit every day, but "... I can still use it effectively. It is easy to pick up; sensible in the way it works." Barry Towdsale, Environment Executive, acknowledges the value of Revit in communicating concepts and detail. David says, "Barry defines the external treatment, we interpret his recommendations in Revit, then get Barry's approval."

More for less

Summing up, David notes, "Revit has enabled us to do more work in less time. The cost was a drop in the ocean for what it has given us. It has turned out to be money well spent." He adds, "There is a further cost benefit, too. Since contractors usually work on a fixed price basis, they bear the cost of their errors. In the same way, we bear the cost of ours, so it is imperative that we do not make any mistakes." As for the future, David says, "We have shown that by working in 3D from the start we can get the elevations and views very quickly and at

reduced cost. Ultimately we will have an intranet for project team access and extranet for contractor access." When asked how the team would have managed without Revit, David commented, "We would have had to use AutoCAD. It would have taken us a lot longer and it would have been much slower. We may have got the same result in the end, but the turn-round on these stores is so fast, just 18 weeks from start to finish, from concept to first shopper. What happens if we're a day late? We can't be." Finally, David has some advice for those looking to move to 3D. He says, "Make sure that the solutions you are evaluating do the things you want, in the way that you want. Then try for yourself. And don't hesitate over implementation. Revit is such an intuitive package that you can just get in and use it. It's as straightforward as that."

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