

Q&A: Topps Tiles Chief executive, Matt Williams

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Matt Williams, Chief executive of Topps Tiles speaks to Retail Week about the retailer's performance and growth prospects.

How is the cold weather affecting Topps Tiles?

The weather in our second quarter didn't help but there was something else going on - the consumer stepped back.

Will the plan to stimulate housing transactions announced in the Budget help Topps?

The devil will be in the detail, but anything that helps the housing market will help us.

What's your outlook for 2013?

Good. The first quarter was strong, second quarter not so. We're still confident we can come in where we need to on profits but it's a tough market and nothing has changed on consumer confidence, disposable income or housing transactions.

How important is the trade side of the business?

Trade makes up 45% of the business and that's growing. The trade come in multiple times a week but a retail customer will come in once every seven years or so. But we couldn't do without either.

Customer service is core to your offer. How important is staff training?

Specialist knowledge and customer service are two key areas that set us apart, so we naturally spend a lot of time training and developing.

What kind of stores do you favour?

We like quite quirky places, we'll take educated compromises. Our heartlands are in London and Manchester but we do well in small market towns too.

How are you aligning the online arm with the stores?

About 98% of our business is done through shops and 2% online, half of which is collected in store. More than 70% of our customers have been online before a purchase. We're aligning stores and online, and fulfil all our web orders through our stores.

How are the new format 'lab stores' performing?

Milton Keynes is performing very well. We've opened three more in the new format in Hounslow, Dorchester and York. We're taking elements of the first lab store and rolling them out across the estate by the end of the year.

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