

## In pictures: Topps Tiles first small format Boutique store opens in Walton-on-Thames

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Topps Tiles opened its first small format Boutique store in Walton-on-Thames this morning (Friday 10th January 2014).



Topps Tiles' Boutique store covers about 2,000 sq ft, compared with a normal 4,000-to-5,000 sq ft Topps Tiles warehouse. Future Boutiques are expected to cover closer to 1,000 sq ft.

In a marked departure for Topps Tiles, the chic format features a contemporary grey fascia and attractive heated tiled floors with 'show' panels that can be changed to highlight the latest tiles. Traditional Topps warehouses have concrete flooring.

Boutique also features a consultation table designed to inspire shoppers to play around with different looks for their homes. There is also a coffee machine customers can use.

The shop offers 2,000 SKUs - half the number of a large store - which have been merchandised to make the product look more appealing. Stock is not kept on site so shoppers' orders are fulfilled either by larger local stores in the area or via the online distribution network.

Topps Tiles chief executive Matt Williams said the new format is designed to offer shoppers more convenience and also to encourage "more people to give us a go". He added it allows Topps Tiles to expand more easily.

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Williams said: “With the larger stores we’re battling against two things – there are towns we can’t fit a warehouse in and also there are customers who won’t consider shopping with us in our traditional locations. Going onto an industrial estate isn’t what they want to do.”

The new in-town locations also means Topps, which this week posted a 9.3% like-for-like sales surge in the 13 weeks to December 28, is attracting a different kind of customer. “Although it’s not the driving force of Boutique, you do end up in more affluent places,” Williams said. “But we’re not making a beeline for any particular customer.”

He added Boutique intends to inspire shoppers to try new styles. “Everything spurs off the consultation table,” said Williams. “We wanted it to be like a kitchen table. Shoppers can walk around the store and get inspiration.”

Boutique’s running costs are about three quarters of a traditional Topps store, Williams said. “We’re looking to achieve a similar return on investment of a normal Topps store,” he added.

The retailer will open a second in Clapham, southwest London on January 31 and another within the M25 by the end of March. Williams said the trial will be evaluated at the end of March.

In November Williams said Topps could open up to 60 Boutique stores if the three-store trial is a success. “I don’t think the high street is dead in any way,” said Williams.

Early indicators suggest Boutique will prove popular in Walton-on-Thames, with shoppers asking to come in to store a day before it formally launched.

Williams added he is noticing that customers are more “committed” when they come into Topps stores because they have researched online beforehand. “We have more determined customers, which is a credit to what we’re doing online,” he said.



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