

New guide from Ardex



Adhesive and grout manufacturer, Ardex, has just released an updated and rebranded tiling product selector. The new Tile and Natural Stone Fixing Guide has been designed to easily guide and assist users of Ardex tiling products in choosing the ideal Ardex system.

The guide includes the recent Ardex product name changes, where product names such as Ardurit and 'Ardicol' have been dispensed with and replaced by Ardex followed by the product number or code. For example Ardurit X7 is now Ardex X 7 and Ardicol D20 is now Ardex D 20. The brochure also includes the new easy reference guiding colours to identify product groups within the overall Ardex product range.

The brochure details Ardex's range of high performance tile fixing and grouting products, including a ready mixed wall tile adhesive, epoxy and cement-based adhesives and grouts, sealants, waterproof coatings and renders; alongside the recently launched range of natural stone products. Advice and guidance is given on product selection, preparation, coverage and installation.

To request a copy call 01440 714939 or e-mail info@ardex.co.uk.

Drilling initiatives

Drilling expert, Armeg has undertaken a number of industry initiatives. In conjunction with Dolphin bathrooms, Armeg is undertaking training sessions for all Dolphin registered installers to pass on the skills required to ensure high quality fixings holes can be created using the PTC products to ensure that Dolphin shower units are installed to the highest of quality levels. Armeg has also been working with Villeroy & Boch; as well as Fischer fixings to create a sink / basin fixing solution set. The set includes the relevant PTC drill sizes as well as Fischer plugs and screws and full instructions.



Armeg has also launched a dedicated website for its PTC (porcelain tile cutter) range: www.armegptccouk

The site has full product range details, easy to run

video demonstrations, a tips and techniques section and extensive FAQ feature.

NIGEL WITHAM



"About two years ago a prospective client invited me to Ireland. I went gladly and together we spent a couple of interesting days touring the north of the country, visiting his stores and spying badly on his competition. The Irish market for ceramics is definitely more mature than in the UK generally and I wondered if this was an indication of things to come here. Regular readers will know that I believe that smart, well laid out stores which seek to enhance the product's perceived values will always out-perform, less well-appointed rivals. There is a much higher proportion of smart stores in Ireland than here and I was interested to study them.

What we found in was that most stores that had used professional designers appeared to be busier but that the store with the most thorough and professional design of all was ghostly quiet. Curious and hard to analyse until you think it through. It certainly does not do to jump to conclusions that design doesn't work, but look at any branch of Topps or Tiles R Us and tell me that it is a triumph of cool design. You can't question their financials though.

So does this mean the scruffier the store the better the results? Does the reverse psychology of convincing people to buy from you by looking cheap really work or are there other issues at play? I don't think so, here's why.

Trends in all other retail sectors demonstrate that clear design and layout increase the perceived value of the product and helps promote the sales message. If your store is in a poor town then this may not be so true but in general people aspire to shop in smart places. In very poor areas cost is always the driver, but if you sell on price you will be limiting your margins so you have to rely on volume. Few are big enough to be successful at this. I think this is why Topps and Tiles R Us succeed and I guess that they are almost unassailable at the bottom end of the market at least. Smaller chains should not try to copy them though. They are the best at what they do for a reason and they won't be beaten easily.

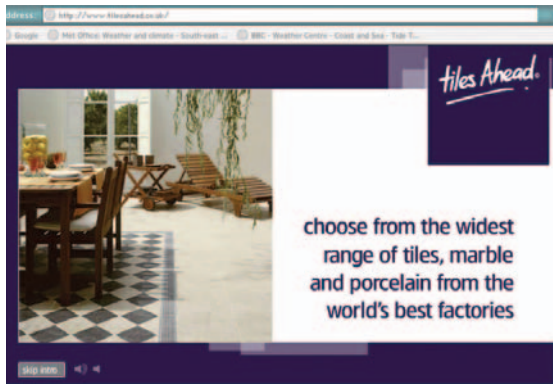
I believe that scruffy stores can work but only when customers either have no better option or when good sales people succeed in spite of them. So for a smaller retailer to do well they should differentiate their offer from the sheds and other bargain sellers. The best way to do this is with design.

The Design Council, a department of the DTI, has proved following long research that a good business with good staff will always do better with good design. I have also found that good design, when applied to a weak business with lazy or incompetent staff, is a waste of money.

I'd like to hear from you if you have taken a smart store downmarket to try and improve sales and it has worked? If so, was it because it was in a poor town? I strongly suspect that looking like a stock warehouse worked well 10 or 20 years ago but that it won't work now and all my present clients agree. Curiously those that don't can no longer afford me.

I remain convinced that professionally designed stores will consistently out perform scruffy ones in all but the lowest price bands and that, as the domestic market matures and competition erodes margins, ceramic retailers will have to prepare their businesses for the challenge by using all the available tools the most important of which are thoughtful advertising, design and staff training. Do let me know if you disagree."

Tiles Ahead on the web



Fast growing South Wales based tile store TilesAhead has just launched an exciting new website. The site can be seen at www.tilesahead.co.uk and was designed by regular TSJ columnist Nigel Witham's team of designers.

"The new website shows our commitment to growing our businesses and succeeding in the face of ever-increasing competition from multiple retailers. It will enhance our customers' perceptions of us and provide them with valuable information on line. We expect to expand the web site as we grow and that it will become an integral part of our business. We have already received orders as a result of going on line with a simple version last year so this should bring even more success." said Tiles Ahead's Managing Director, Nick McDonald.

Tiles Ahead are now in the final phases of planning a spectacular new showroom, also designed by Nigel Witham, which will be opening in Spring 2005.

Nigel Witham, 01892 614466 or www.nigelw.com

Drilling initiatives

It is usually the swimmers who break records: but now there is a swimming pool that could break a record. A local authority pool in Shropshire could be a record breaker when refurbishment work, starting in September, is completed. Bridgnorth Council is closing its pool at Highley for the winter to refurbish the pool and install a solar heating system which is thought to be the largest of its kind in the world. The 25 by 10m outdoor pool was due to be refurbished and the Council was keen to use renewable energy. "Solar heating seemed to be the answer but we were concerned that the panels would get damaged if they were on the ground," explains the Council's Project Manager, Mike Baker. To overcome the problem solar heating specialists Riomay Heating designed a huge pergola on which the solar panels would sit. The idea was the brainchild of Riomay Managing Director, Tony Book. "I designed a small version of the solar pagoda for a garden at the Chelsea Flower Show a couple of years ago and it was a big success. Since then we have installed several in Europe but nothing on the scale of the Bridgenorth project," says Book.

Once erected, the solar pergola will provide enough heat to keep the pool warm from Easter to September and provide shelter for users of the nearby bowling green.



LESLEY-ANN BLAMIRE

Time has become the latest obsession. How to describe it, measure it, divide it and more importantly how to value, maximise and fight it. Faced with multi-tasking lives and compromises between work and private time and commitments, we all seek time-saving solutions. Conscious of the constant battle to beat the clock, the intelligent company should be investing time in anticipating what the future will bring and most importantly anticipating future consumer behaviour, needs and desires. Why? Because consumer demand for products with inner meaning and personal values is set to grow.

As consumers we are at a crossroads encountering extremes of reason and emotion. We are compelled to move forward, to develop, to innovate, to break new ground. However, as we stand back to analyse our ever improving lifestyles we see that some of the most positive and lasting influences come from the past. We require the emotional security of the past to allow us to move forward and embrace the future. The global growth in the interest of genealogy and ancestry points further to this, consolidating this introverted need to understand who we are and the growing importance of the past in shaping our lives and personalities. General and traditional lifestyle classifications fall by the way side as we can be anything we want to be and anything goes. We have an urgency to communicate our identity, which manifests in self-belief and self-confidence. We demand choice; we feel we have the right to do anything we like. The importance of choice and individuality therefore needs to form the platform for all R&D, design, marketing and sales activity.

For marketers, time then is the secret ingredient in effective research. Understanding and anticipating the timing of the constant shifts in human behaviour is crucial. A tight combination of effective research and accurate forecasting is the answer, as developing the right vehicles to communicate product soul and inner meaning can only come from vision and insight.

For design, time is the fourth dimension in conceptualising products with soul. The key is in creating new hybrids of past and future, fusing characteristics from opposing times, intertwining and combining antiquity, nostalgia and craftsmanship with advanced techno effects and precision. This, in turn, places greater emphasis on the research of new materials and techniques, indicating the importance of forging greater links with Sassuolo, in addition to the need to demonstrate an understanding of, and respect for, tradition. In ceramic terms this means a future resurgence in the importance of traditional techniques such as cotto and majolica, off-set with an ironic and enlivened approach to colour and materials. Without doubt, every Italian studio worth its salt will be spotlighting the early origins of these new ceramic hybrids at Cersaie.

Many manufacturers boast strong brand equity and brand heritage, very few preserve and renew it. Having 'the vision' is what sets apart the leading brands from the followers. For any manufacturer anticipating developing their vision, this means tearing up the traditional design and marketing brief (usually dictated to by outdated product and sales intelligence) and encouraging marketers away from product and towards human behaviour and desire. With time being so compressed and so precious and brand identity being intrinsically linked to product soul, the importance of having a true visionary in the board room is underlined, not in order that they express your corporate identity but to trust that they create it, innovate with it, develop it and constantly re-invent it.