

# O2 to appoint interiors group as it rings changes in UK stores

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O<sub>2</sub> is poised to undertake a radical overhaul of its UK retail estate before the end of the year.

The mobile phone giant has confirmed it is to re-invent its retail store format as a community space, and is to appoint a design consultancy.



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O<sub>2</sub> held a five-way pitch at the end of May between design and architecture groups Checkland Kindleysides, Household, Jump Studios, Mackay & Partners and Jordan Parnass Digital Architecture – the New York consultancy responsible for the brand's experience store at The O<sub>2</sub> venue.

It is thought that JPDA will be handed the business within the next fortnight, though contracts have yet to be finalised.

UK store design strategy manager Deborah Boyd-Evans, who led the pitch, explains why O<sub>2</sub> veered towards architecture/ interior-led groups over traditional retail consultancies.

'We've set out to achieve something different, not only in terms of mobile phone retail, but in retail generally. We want to create a shop that you look at and say "wow" but not something that's so iconic it doesn't appeal to the man in the street. The kind of groups we looked at have either done work that touches people or we know they are capable of delivering something special. The mindset and chemistry was also important,' says Boyd-Evans.

The store concept, still in its infancy, will focus on 'putting people at the heart of the store' and will have strong elements of destination retail, 'where people want to go' without necessarily buying a handset.

'So many people spend time, or even conduct meetings, in coffee shops these days. We want to create a home away from home, a third space if you like,' says Boyd-Evans.

The shift away from hard retail sales to building brand loyalty is the driver behind the concept.

The design is expected to incorporate elements found in the experience store at The O<sub>2</sub> venue, moving away from the brand's traditional colour palette of dark blue, towards warmer hues.

O<sub>2</sub> brand guardian Lambie- Lairn's group account director Nicky Nicolls says that the group expects to oversee branding for the project, once an appointment for the retail design has been made.

## O<sub>2</sub> STATISTICS

- 17 million customers in the UK
- 442 retail stores across the UK
- O<sub>2</sub> owns 50 per cent of the Tesco Mobile joint venture in the UK and has 100 per cent ownership of Be, a UK fixed broadband provider
- O<sub>2</sub> UK is part of Telefónica O2 Europe, with services across the UK, Ireland, Germany and the Czech Republic
- Design groups Imagination, Murray 03, Digit and Ideo have previously all worked with O<sub>2</sub> on retail store interiors