

We are going to the movies

Steve Thomas-Emberson explores the world of digital retail design.

‘Video killed the radio star’ went the 1970’s hip record. Yes, it was a record, certainly not a ‘music download’ into your mobile phone via something called an ‘App’. Life was so simple then - in the slow lane. Retail design was executed on sheets of paper and then explained to the retailer in the hope he or she understood it. Fast-forward to today and we have ‘animation’; it takes longer to prepare but the end result is just so much more exciting and a shop designed in London can be built in Dubai. In fact, forget about a simple shop let’s talk about a Shopping Centre or Airport interior, for that is what is now happening. This is not the world of the retail designer, it is the global domain of the ‘Senior Visualiser’ as Wojciech Piwowarczyk of The Design Solution explained. “Many things have changed since we first stated to use Animation. There is always more than just outstanding visual quality that we strive for. We try to tell a different story each time and capture the

spirit and experience of a particular place. To achieve this we always use a tailored soundtrack composed and produced in-house. This is set to the film animation. Lighting is very important so we use different lighting styles to achieve the best natural light and atmosphere of the building. For example at Abu Dhabi airport we used volumetric light techniques to emphasise the spirit of Middle Eastern interiors with strong light piercing through the windows. To add more realism and capture the human scale we used real film footage of people shopping.”

These animations that are produced for the retail client give the client a useful marketing tool. It provides them with a captured vision which helps them to find the best selection of vendors and inspire them to provide exceptional designs of their own. For the Architect, Designers like The Design Solution animation helps them to understand the space and greatly



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improves the communication process, especially when talking country to country. The client can easily understand their intentions and creative ideas as Piwowarczyk says, “The client will have more confidence and faith in us, letting us go one step further. Our collaboration with clients is much more fruitful and our creative work more mature, it develops faster and we are able to verify them better, to make sure the designs work in reality.”

A good example of The Design Solutions work will be the new Duty Free area at Dublin airport where animation was used to good effect in the concept stage as the building is not built yet! It is going to be a very big store and will be quite unique in terms of its layout. Here animation helped both parties to understand the passenger journey through the space. One of the main ideas for the shop is that areas flow into another. Without a film from a passenger’s perspective it would be impossible to correctly judge and develop this concept. For

both parties perspective animation felt a much more natural medium to communicate the design, closer to the real thing.

Last December The Design Solution won the contract for Abu Dhabi airports Retail Design and Planning in which animation was to feature. The timescale was very short so animation was the preferred ‘design ideas delivery medium’. Piwowarczyk explains the story. “We knew that we had to have something that would catch their attention and generate enough interest to be able to explain our concept and ideas during the very long presentation. We started off with a few minutes animation showing of the space and what it was for, and had to achieve. This convinced our clients of the design proposal and helped us to generate trust that led us to win the completion.”

Animation like this is very much in its infancy, it will develop fast but where will it go from a retailer’s perspective as it

appears to be easily understood. Piwowarczyk tells us how he sees the future. “We will be trying to produce richer videos where sound and vision create clearer a more realistic picture. We wish to produce films with a strong background story that drives the design message. I hope to see more visual styles and techniques to represent better the mood and experience that is retail. We must always be accurate and as photo-realistic as possible but still with the artistic touch, and provide a very light and easily digested message. We are not and must not be afraid to venture into unknown creative territories and be able to surprise with something new each time. This is what I see as important”.

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