

IN-STORE

## Selfridges accounts for rise in tax-free shopping with new service department

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*Selfridges' International Service department*

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By JEN KING

British department store chain Selfridges is responding to the rise of international consumers by organizing a dedicated customer service center inside its London flagship.

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**Luxury Daily**

Located on the retailer's fourth floor, instead of the ground level where it previously was held, Selfridges has tripled the space, and prominence, of its International Service department. Acknowledging the differing needs of international consumers compared to those based locally will help instill a global sense of trust in Selfridges and its policies.

"Selfridges is a world-renowned international shopping destination with a rich heritage of delivering extraordinary customer experiences," said Brian Brunk, principal at Boston Retail Partners, Boston.

"With many very affluent international customers, expanding its dedicated customer services space will attract more VIP customers and inspire them to stay and shop longer," he said.

"VIP international customers expect premium services and the high-touch exceptional services delivered in the exclusive Customer Services space will enhance the brand

experience and elevate their perception of Selfridges."

Mr. Brunk is not affiliated with Selfridges, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

**Selfridges** was unable to comment directly before press deadline.

At your service

The retailer is taking a new approach to customer service for its international consumers due to the increase of tax-free shopping, a trend that is only likely to increase as individuals from emerging markets begin to travel.

To be fully ready, Selfridges has retooled its International Service department to account for international consumer growth. Planned over 16-months, the new space is organized to accommodate future tax-free consumers while presenting a luxurious experience for those already spending at Selfridges.

In a statement, the retailer described the department as "an exceptional example of Selfridges' commitment to developing new shopping and service spaces, whilst demonstrating outstanding commitment to preserving and restoring the grandeur and original features of the iconic neo-classical building."



### *The International Service department within Selfridges*

Selfridges' International Service department is positioned atop of the iconic Queen of Time clock found on the store's central historic canopy.

The space, designed by architects Waldo Works, includes a Tax Refund Lounge, two Tax Free Halls, a number of VIP areas for ultra-high-net-worth individuals who would like to shop discreetly and those attending guided shopping tours.

In addition the International Service department, houses a Quiet room, two library areas, a refreshment room and a Mac room where consumers can browse and make purchases on Selfridges' Web site, check-in via social media and open emails. Also, Selfridges consumers are welcome to book excursions while at the department store at the Theatre Desk, operated by Time Out.



### *Selfridges' Mac room within the International Service department*

To account for the cultures of Selfridges' international consumers, the retailer has designed a Faith room where consumers can quietly worship or meditate.

For its design elements, Waldo Works channelled the department store's opening in the early 1900s, an era marked by the "golden age of travel." To this notion, Waldo Works created spaces inspired by the elegant waiting rooms of the period.

Also, to continue a link to Selfridges' own heritage, the architects placed palms into the

decor to link the space to the department store's first restaurant Palm Court, which was partially destroyed by fire in the 1940s.



### *Space within Selfridges' International Service department*

To introduce the department to consumers, Selfridges shared a series of images of the space on social media.

The retailer also sent out an email blast to its newsletter subscribers. In the message's headline Selfridges informs recipients of a new opening while the body shows an interior image of the department with a link for additional information.

Selfridges' email lands on blog article describing the International Service department and its amenities.

### Digital white glove service

Retailers often recalibrate their approach to customer service to maintain quality of assistance as tastes change. In recent months, these updates have been digitized to best serve the modern-day consumer.

For example, department store chain Neiman Marcus launched interactive retail tables that allow consumers to browse inventory using touchscreen technology in three select stores.

The tables are currently active in the Austin, TX, Chicago, and Topanga, CA locations of the department store, where they can be found in the luxury shoe salons. They will assist consumers in browsing inventory that may not be available in-store but can be accessed online or at other Neiman Marcus locations ([see story](#)).

Also, department store chain Bloomingdale's opened its first fully mobile store in Palo Alto, CA, in October 2014 to appeal to the "digitally sophisticated" tech community in Silicon Valley.

Featuring smart dressing rooms, mobile checkout, consumer-facing tablets and sales associates armed with mobile devices, the store in the Stanford Shopping Center heightens the omnichannel experience for shoppers. This neighborhood is a good testing

ground for new retail technologies, which Bloomingdale's may want to carry over to other locations ([see story](#)).

Just as other retailers have implemented mobile and digital touchpoints in ways similar to competitors, international customer service centers may be a growing trend.

"We will likely see other upscale retailers in London and other key international shopping destinations attempt to offer similar exclusive services," Mr. Brunk said.

"Selfridges is definitely one of the most innovative leaders in the luxury retail segment and smart retailers will react and follow their lead," he said.

Final Take

*Jen King, lead reporter on Luxury Daily, New York*

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