

RETAIL

## Eyeing Europe expansion, FAO Schwarz toy boutique opens in London's Selfridges

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*Selfridges debuts Europe's FAO Schwarz flagship destination at its London Oxford Street store. Photo and copyright: Matt Whittle. Image credit: Selfridges*

By STAFF REPORTS

Department store chain Selfridges will open Europe's first FAO Schwarz flagship store in London, adding to the stores in Beijing and New York as the toy seller revives under new ownership.

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The 22,000-square-foot FAO store-within-store in Selfridges is second in size to the shop in Beijing and also bigger than the **retail location at Rockefeller Center** in New York. ThreeSixty Group is spearheading FAO's expansion after buying the brand out of Toys "R" Us' bankruptcy.

"Selfridges is the perfect partner for FAO Schwarz in the U.K. and to start our expansion into Europe," said Jan-Eric Kloth, chief operating officer of ThreeSixty Group, in a statement.

Mr. Kloth said **Selfridges** "is fully aligned with our goal to innovate and push the limits of traditional retail with our customized on-site experiences and activations."

Game on

The London boutique will offer the FAO Schwarz toy line with items exclusive to Selfridges.

Targeting pre-schoolers to early teens, the toys will encompass the Discovery #Mindblown scientific and technology collection and Sharper Image line of robotic, remote control and laser line gadgets.

Also on offer will be dolls, plush toys, kids' tech, magnets, souvenirs and automotive toys, as well as ranges from brands such as Playmobil, Lego, Steiff, Bunnies By The Bay, Schleich and Build-a-Bear.

An entire section of the destination will be dedicated to FAO Schweetz, FAO Schwarz's exclusive branded candy destination, with a range of candy including two-pound gummy bears.



*FAO Schwarz's candy section at London's Selfridges, selling its FAO Schweetz line. Photo: Marcus Peel. Image credit: Selfridges*

FAO said at launch it will sell more than 2,000 product lines at Selfridges, with 130,000-plus SKUs.

Toy ambassadors and product demonstrators a staple of FAO for decades will add the experiential element to the toy shopping process.

#### Toy story

FAO Schwarz in 1870 founded his eponymous store in New York, offering unique toys at premium prices. The brand foundered in the last couple of decades as toy retailing moved to big box stores, first threatened by Toys "R" Us and then by Walmart, and later by the rise of ecommerce.

FAO was purchased by Toys "R" Us, which itself went bankrupt as digital amusement and Amazon took over the toy retail business.

**ThreeSixty Group** in 2016 bought the intellectual property of FAO and is in the process of bringing back the brand with a hybrid retail model.

Seeking common ground, FAO and Selfridges claim another affinity: Americans founded both brands.

Wisconsin-born Harry Gordon Selfridge Sr. founded his self-named store in 1909 at the western end of London's Oxford Street, investing 400,000 pounds at the time.

After changing hands several times and going through ups and downs, Selfridges was sold in 2003 to Canada's Galen Weston.



*Lego section in FAO Schwarz's boutique at London's Selfridges. Photo: Marcus Peel. Image credit: Selfridges*

NOW, THE EMBRACE of FAO opens a new chapter for both Selfridges and the toy retailer.

"We are thrilled to bring the wonder, excitement and passion for toys at the heart of FAO Schwarz and offer them to our customers," said Martyn Stroud, director of home and toys at Selfridges, in a statement.

"The pairing of our brands, both originated by American founders and steeped in a shared sense of showmanship and outstanding customer service, is a perfect fit," he said.