THE BUSINESS OF LUXURY: CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPECIFYING CARPET IN THE COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL SECTORS
Introduction

Evolving dynamics in the commercial and retail sectors has changed the face of interior design. The disruptive e-commerce landscape has forced the retail sector to reimagine their brick and mortar operations and traditional approaches. Forward-thinking retailers are adopting innovative strategies to leverage their shopfront assets into a competitive advantage, delivering memorable “brand experiences” to their clients and providing a sense of tangibility and completeness that cannot be met in the e-commerce retail space. While comfort, durability, health and wellbeing remain key considerations when specifying interior elements, how a retail space communicates a brand’s values and identity has driven the need for more ‘custom’ or ‘bespoke’ solutions.

The commercial sector faces a similar cultural shift. The growing ‘gig economy’, agile work practices and the ‘war on talent’ has forced companies to rethink how they attract and retain talent. Architects and designers have been asked to develop innovative employee-centric workspaces that promote end-user wellbeing while enabling greater efficiency and productivity. These sectors, while different on the surface, place similar demands upon the performance of their interior spaces. Both sectors aim to nurture and comfort their end users, encouraging free buying behaviours in a retail setting and promoting a supportive atmosphere in a commercial workspace. Both sectors require design solutions to withstand high levels of foot traffic. Finally, both sectors must maximise style and functionality in increasingly smaller spaces due to upward trends in property costs - forcing companies to downsize built assets and a competitive retail lease market facing soaring rates.

In this context, specifying carpet for retail and commercial projects holds a significant number of overlapping considerations. In this white paper, we discuss the critical factors that should be considered when selecting carpet for retail or commercial use, and highlight a number of innovative products that deliver on style, performance and functionality.
Why use carpet?

Carpet is a popular flooring solution partly due to its versatility and durability. There are a wide variety of carpet styles, fibre composition and colours that can be selected depending on the needs of the space.⁴ New technologies allow for multilevel loop and cut-loop patterns with complex designs. In some cases, carpet is a more durable and sustainable alternative to other flooring options, making it an attractive option for the environmentally conscious. There is a carpet solution to suit almost any space, from corporate offices through to public spaces.

In the retail sector, studies have established that carpet is one of the interior variables that can produce specific emotional effects in potential customers, enhancing their purchase probability.⁵ In retail projects where luxury and premium quality is often required, carpet is a viable solution; its warm, cosy character contributes to a comfortable, inviting atmosphere that encourages visitors to feel ‘trust’ and ‘assurance’. Carpet can also be a key contributor to in-store ambience and mood, which, along with consistent visual merchandising and retailing, can effectively project a specific, desirable image of a brand or store to potential customers.⁶

Similarly, in commercial spaces, carpet can be used to evoke the softness and warmth of a home for the benefit of employee wellbeing. The ‘domestication’ of the office has been identified as a top workplace trend, and carpet is being utilised in office interiors to evoke the familiar feeling of ‘home’.⁷ This is particularly effective when materials and styles typically found in residential projects are integrated into commercial projects. In a competitive talent economy, where prospective employees are increasingly valuing health and wellbeing, carpet can be used to bring comfort into an otherwise unfamiliar, formal space.
Key considerations when specifying carpet

To ensure that the benefits of carpet are fully realised for retail and commercial spaces, correct specification must account for the particular requirements of the space and how the carpet will be used.

Going The Extra Mile: Durability
As with all good design, specifiers need to match carpet to its purpose and proper end use. Durability is a key factor in this calculation as a highly durable carpet will retain its appearance and will have a longer life expectancy. This is important in retail spaces that are typically subject to higher levels of foot traffic. Using an impractical material or colour for the type of usage for carpet in such spaces can be problematic for assets balance sheets. It is imperative, therefore, that active specifiers in this space select the appropriate carpet materials and colours designed for high wear and tear to ensure that the degree of appearance retention expected by the client is maintained.

Multiple construction factors determine if a carpet will perform in high traffic areas. This includes yarn density, yarn size, appropriate backing systems and a dye technique consistent with the end use.8

In retail and commercial projects that involve irregular shaped floorplates or are spread across several floors, carpet tiles are advisable over carpet rolls. This is because carpet tiles can be easily removed, are easily transportable into high-rise buildings, and allow for spot replacement if they are damaged or require maintenance. If carpet roll is selected, it is recommended to install a carpet with a non-ravel construction, which will resist fraying after being cut, and allows small sections to be replaced without seam sealers.

The Era Of The Brand: Design Flexibility
The Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI) notes “colours and patterns in a carpet can create a distinctive atmosphere, serve a practical purpose, or send a message.”9 Designers and specifiers must determine what ‘look’ they are trying to achieve, and what features, patterns, colours and textures will help achieve that look. Carpet rolls help to achieve a consistent pattern over a large area, whereas carpet tiles or custom-designed rug formats can provide a higher degree of flexibility with the ability to mix different shapes and designs.

Communicating a brand identity is often a primary purpose in retail projects, and selecting the right colour and style of carpet is important in achieving a coordinated design. Colour selection can also set a mood and have psychological impacts on end users.10 Neutral or earthy colours can produce a soothing effect, sharper blues achieve a corporate look and shades of reds and orange evoke feelings of energy and vitality.11 In commercial spaces, variations in colour and design provide visual stimulation assisting employees to stay alert, improving productivity.12
While carpet has had negative reports over the years about its effect on indoor air quality, there is now evidence to show that, as opposed to hard flooring, carpet’s ability to capture and hold fine dust actively improves indoor air quality when a healthy, low VOC, carpet is selected.

Stop noise from ruining your open office:
Acoustic Considerations
Excess noise can undermine even the most coordinated and atmospheric designs. Passive acoustic measures, such as decorative acoustic coverings, soft furnishings and carpet, can all contribute to sound comfort in both retail and commercial spaces. The CRI notes that properly specified carpet can absorb “airborne noise as efficiently as many specialized acoustical materials.”

The reasons for taking advantage of carpeting’s acoustic properties vary slightly between commercial and retail projects. Modern offices are characterised by open plan arrangements that cater to different styles of work (collaborative areas, private workstations etc.). Accordingly, it is important to manage noise transfer between different work areas to avoid distractions that impact on productivity. The Harvard Business Review referenced a 2014 study by Steelcase and Ipsos that found workers lost up to 86 minutes per day due to noise distractions. In a University of Sydney study, the majority of respondents also reported lack of sound privacy as the biggest frustration in workplaces. When used with an underlay, carpet can alleviate some of these issues as it can absorb sound and block its transmission between spaces.

Health and Wellbeing: Health Considerations
For allergy and asthma sufferers, the critical issue is the amount of dust and allergens present in the air. A major study by the German Allergy & Asthma Society in 2005 found that carpet has a purifying effect by absorbing VOCs e.g. formaldehyde, and trapping particulates present in indoor air. The study shows that carpet performs 50% better than hard flooring in reducing dust in the air. So while carpet has had negative reports over the years about its effect on indoor air quality, there is now evidence to show that, as opposed to hard flooring, carpet’s ability to capture & hold fine dust actively improves indoor air quality when a healthy, low VOC, carpet is selected. The argument for good maintenance to reduce the negative impact of poor quality air applies equally to both hard and soft flooring to ensure that pollutants are not being released into the air to be inhaled by the occupants.

For retail projects, a sense of refuge, quiet and comfort is often required to put visitors at ease and increase the likelihood of converting them into purchasers. The management of sound in a retail space is an important component of design as different soundscapes can promote sensory overload that can lead to ‘buying-friendly’ psychological behaviours. Another approach is where retailers are advised to implement auditory experiences that minimise feelings of annoyance, promote comfort, and encourage buying. This may require mitigating against that ‘sensory overload’ and excess volume, so specifiers should ensure they look for carpet solutions that offer acoustic insulation and/or use an acoustic underlay.

It is also advisable to select carpet that is free from toxic chemicals. Quality healthy carpets are low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs) or “off-gas”, whereas low quality carpets may emit VOCs up to five years post installation. So it is noteworthy that according to the Carpet Institute of Australia, quality carpets can have a purifying effect on indoor air quality by absorbing pollutants and VOCs.
Gibbon Group

For many decades, Gibbon Group has sourced the globe for innovative, on-trend carpet roll, carpet tiles, and custom rugs. Strong R+D capabilities are driven by a focus on sustainability and commitment to delivering products that enhance user wellbeing and help shape considered, balanced spaces. It is this finely tuned understanding of the role of design in creating healthy, happy spaces that makes Gibbon Group flooring solutions ideal for a wide range of applications including multi-residential, educational, commercial and retail projects.

Modulyss carpet tiles and planks and Tretford carpet roll, tiles and custom rugs are the new generation of carpet solutions – both carpet brands ensure that their products are free of toxic chemicals.

Modulyss and Tretford modular carpet tiles allow for phased installation and produce significantly less waste than fitted carpet. Modular carpet tiles also provide maximum design flexibility, giving designers the ability to achieve seamless, coordinated looks, or mix and match colours, shapes and patterns for dynamic, shape shifting designs. Outstanding appearance retention and long life expectancy, as well as superior acoustic performance, make this flooring solution ideal for the exacting demands of retail and commercial spaces.

Tretford corded carpet roll is made with up to 80% highest-grade natural cashmere and is one of Gibbon Group’s most trusted products, with over 40 years of history. Free from toxic chemicals, this carpeting solution also promotes end-user health and well being while providing world-class aesthetics and performance. Designed for high dimensional stability and sharp cutability, corded carpet roll allows for cuts in any direction without fraying, as well as replacement of small sections without seam sealers.

Gibbon Group also offers a range of backings (specific to the manufacturer), which are designed to extend the lifespan of carpet and enhance comfort, durability, acoustic and thermal performance.

Image: Virgin Trains by APSS. Featuring modulyss First and New Shapes.


4. Above n 1.


8. Above n 1.


11. Above n 1.


18. Above n 17.

19. Ibid.

20. (Taken from research compiled by The Aust Carpet Institute

21. Ref: German Allergy and Asthma Society (DAAB), Media Release 18 June 2005)

