

One project developed by ECE's Future Labs to integrate online and offline is the Click & Collect function, which can be integrated into the center app.

SHOPPING CENTER RELOADED

Easier parking, same-day delivery services, digital navigation capabilities, and online ordering by “Click&Collect” are just some of the services that ECE is providing to make its centers fit for the future.



“Trade signifies change” goes a memorable expression, and this is true today more than ever: Globalization is progressing, the issue of sustainability is gaining importance, and demographic changes require a rethink. The biggest challenge for “classic” bricks-and-mortar retail, however, is likely to be e-commerce, which continuously records higher revenue and is thus becoming an important driver of transformation in retailing. Nothing can happen in the future without strategies that take account of this development. How does a mall of the future look like one which adapts to new customer needs and can compete in an increasingly digital world? Sebastian Baumann, innovation and project manager of ECE’s “Future Labs,” explains: “The boundaries between online and offline are increasingly disappearing. In the future,

customers will expect a barrier-free, multichannel experience and services such as Click & Collect. Mobile payment and the ability to check the availability of goods online will also play a significant role. In general, innovation cycles will get shorter and their jumps even bigger due to the increasingly rapid pace of technological development.”

FUTURE LABS FOR TESTING NEW SERVICES

In order to be a leader in these jumps and merge the advantages of the online world with the benefits of “real” shopping, ECE launched the “Future Labs” in the spring of 2013. Limbecker Platz in Essen and Alstertal-Einkaufszentrum in Hamburg serve as test laboratories for new technologies and services.

Offers that customers take up are then rolled out at other ECE shopping centers. Services that do not meet expectations (so far, this has included an avatar as a virtual provider of customer information and a social media check-in) are dropped on a trial-and-error basis.

Examples of activities that are very popular are the free center apps. They are at the heart of the Future Labs and have been rolled out in 27 other ECE shopping centers due to their great success under the name "Love to Shop." Center apps allow users to receive personalized and relevant information on deals in the center only when they approach the respective shop. They have already been downloaded by over 130,000 customers. Other Future Labs services that are being rolled out include a 3D orientation system, digital playgrounds, and free Wi-Fi access.

Another project for the integration of online and offline is the Click&Collect function, which can be integrated into the center app. Customers can now use PayPal to buy selected products at participa-

“ We have to reinvent ourselves again and again to continue to meet the expectations of our customers. We are therefore picking up the latest trends and testing, in our Future Labs for example, new technologies for a more personalized shopping experience. ”



JOANNA FISHER

Managing Director
Center Management



ting stores via the apps from Alstertal shopping center and Limbecker Platz and can then pick them up on the same day or at another desired time.

CONVENIENT PARKING

It is not only the shopping experience itself that influences the joys and sorrows of offline





"Same Day Delivery" enables customers to get purchases from the center transported home the same evening.



Center staff answer visitors' questions via live video stream at the Info Gate.



customers, but the entire customer journey; for motorists, this begins with parking. The Future Labs have recently developed an innovation for this, too: the contactless parking card with RFID chip (Radio Frequency Identification). Sensors in the center parking garage recognize the RFID card placed behind the sun visor so that the driver does not have to roll down the window in wind and stormy weather to take a parking ticket. The amount to be paid is then automatically deducted when the visitor drives out. Say "goodbye" to waiting at the ticket machine and fumbling around with coins.

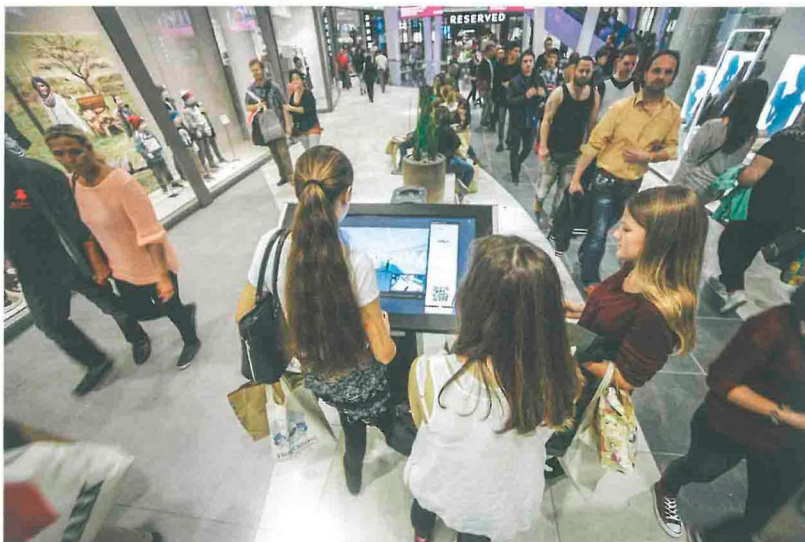
3D guiding systems form part of the services that were well received by the customers and, as a result, have been rolled out in other centers since 2014.

The Future Labs are also testing various solutions for finding one's way in a center. The 3D orientation system at center entrances has already proved itself

in practice. Customers can search for products, brands, and shops using the touchscreen and are then shown the shortest route to the desired store in a 3D view. In the future, this will be even easier: By using their own smartphones and the center app, customers will be able to use this system from any location in the center, thanks to so-called iBeacons. Sebastian Baumann explains the fledgling concept: "The iBeacons are small transmitters based on Bluetooth. If a customer has installed the corresponding center app on her smartphone, the app can communicate with the beacons situated throughout the center and determine the user's position, allowing location-based messages – for example about special offers – to be sent accurately as well."

SERVICE GAINING IMPORTANCE

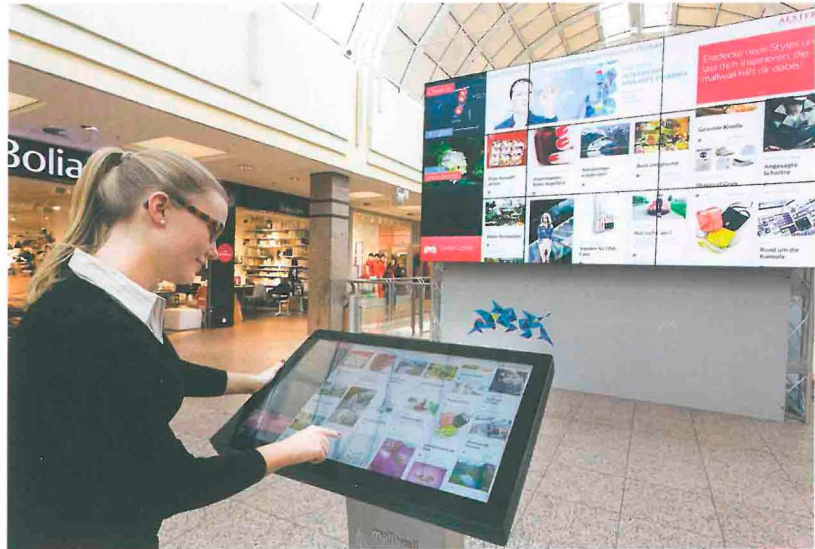
Speaking of special offers: According to the large-scale multichannel study "On customers' trail," in which ECE, together with Roland Berger Strategy Consultants, interviewed 42,000 consumers, price is not the decisive factor for the choice of shopping channels. Offline customers will at times happily pay more for goods that are immediately available or to obtain professional advice. What they like to avoid, however, is cumbersome hauling larger purchases home. This is remedied by the "same



day delivery” offer, which was first introduced at the new Milaneo in Stuttgart and some other centers. The service enables customers to get purchases from the mall transported home the same evening. Customers leave their bags at the so-called “drop-off point” in the center, leave a requested delivery address, and get the goods delivered the same day for a small fee. This attracts great interest among center visitors in Stuttgart. Each delivery customer has an average of three shopping bags delivered. Electronics, fashion, and food predominate.

WITH ALL SENSES

As important as service is, in bricks-and-mortar retail, in particular, it’s about winning customers through emotions. After all, the internet cannot yet come close to providing a shopping experience for all the senses. ECE is therefore experimenting with light, sound, and smells to make their shopping centers very special places. Baumann and ECE’s architects are already planning the first application in practice at the new Aquis Plaza, which will open its door in Aachen in the autumn.



There are diverse possibilities for shopping centers to retain customers, even in times of rapid change. The aim is to exploit synergies with the digital world and focus on its strengths: Centers are thus more than just places of consumption.



*Highly popular:
The “Mall Wall,” a giant
interactive screen with
the latest offers in the
center, entertainment
facilities, and
infotainment*