

## INNOVATION



Hammerson's high-tech retail and leisure centre Les Terrasses du Port

## New tech: handle with care

Real innovation can be hard to come by and retailers and developers should beware of some of the claims made by purveyors of new technology. John Ryan reports

**N**OT all technology which claims to make life better for shoppers and result in incremental sales should be trusted. So what should shopping-centre owners and retailer developers be looking out for? There are, of course, good reasons for embracing technology, but there are plenty of areas that might be treated with caution. Pamela Wolf, director strategic innovation southern Europe at Salesforce.com, says that it's a matter of what shoppers want: "I believe that customer expectations are much higher today than shopping centres, or retailers for that matter, think they are. The expectations bar is set through customer interactions across many brands and services spanning various industries. For example, if you've had wonderful service from Macy's or Ama-

zon, you neither understand nor accept why every other customer service department out there can't perform at the same level." She adds: "Retailers and shopping centres can get too caught up in technology and shiny new toys. It's not great when they expect that their customers will automatically opt-in and want to play on the technology. The biggest problem is that technology isn't the end of the story — it's what enables the next level of interaction."

Practically, this could mean anything from lighting to flats screens. LED lighting, for example, has done much to improve both the quality of light and the way in which it is used in shopping centres and shops over the past decade and today it is widely accessible. When a new piece of technology becomes available, what's



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**Bastien Leal**

important is how it is used. The question of relevance to specific shoppers has to be asked, too.

Digital technology has brought with it the availability of data which, according to Heather Hooks, vice-president of marketing at Teralytics, can bring problems for both retailers and shopping-centre owners: “Data people are drowning in data and starving for insight,” she says. Teralytics provides information about shopper hotspots using information gleaned from mobile-phone signals. On top of this it overlays data about where shoppers actually live, based upon where their mobiles spend most of the time. All of which implies that meaningful information can be generated about where shoppers shop, how often and when. It’s a little like having a person positioned on every street, counting the shoppers and then collating the results.

This is the kind of sophistication that shopping-centre developers can tap into and is another, non-customer-facing use of technology that is increasingly proving useful for those in the business of finding appropriate locations for retail.

At developer Hammerson, data collection is effected across centres in the UK and France via a mix of beacons that monitor in-mall shopper traffic and an app that customers can download which offers everything from retailer promotions to extended parking. “It’s progressively replacing the loyalty card in our centres,” says Bastien Leal, director of marketing and communications at Hammerson in France, says. He adds: “We know that what is key now is to engage shoppers, not just to send them things.” It’s a point that seems likely to gain further

## TECH COMPANIES TAKE TO THE MAPIC STAGE

**BUILDING** on the success of its first edition last year, MAPIC Open Stage, a crowdsourcing operation that allows MAPIC delegates to choose conference topics, has returned with two new winners. Technology companies Mureo and Coniq have been chosen to give speeches during a special pitching session at MAPIC. MAPIC Open Stage is a competition enabling retail property professionals to suggest conference topics on the theme of innovation. Visitors to the [mapic.com](http://mapic.com) website were asked to vote for their favourites.

“MAPIC Open Stage is an opportunity for innovative companies of the retail sector to present their concepts,” MAPIC director Nathalie Depetro said. “This year, the use and retrieval of data were core preoccupations of the retail property industry. Those topics will also be relayed in the MAPIC Innovation Forum programme.”

Ben Chesser, CEO at the UK’s Coniq, will present *How To Build Better Tenant Relationships To Maximise Shopping Centre Performance* on Wednesday, November 18 at 14.15. Edouard Detaille, managing director at France’s Mureo, will present *The First Digital Platform Focused On High-Street Retail With An Auctioning System*, on the same day at 16.45.

traction and serves to show that innovation in retail developments is about rather more than putting a few high-resolution screens into a location and hoping for the best. Technology can affect so many aspects of retail and can be shopper-facing or retailer/developer-informing. And it is still evolving in ways that might not have been anticipated just a few years ago. The perils of being an early-adopter are well documented. There is, however, a balance between being ahead of the curve and being late to the game. Experience and a degree of cynicism will probably be needed to tread this fine line effectively.

## INNOVATION FORUM HOSTS HOT TOPICS

**TECHNOLOGY** is having a massive impact on retail and property alike, and the MAPIC Innovation Forum will explore emerging trends and strategies for an omni-channel world.

Key sessions today include a panel debate on data entitled *How To Capture Data For Business Growth* as well as pitching sessions by some of the sector’s most interesting startups.

