



Why mobile is fast becoming the biggest utility in retail



WITH MOBILE TECHNOLOGY INCREASINGLY BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE ONLINE AND OFFLINE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE, CRAIG BIRCHENOUGH AND VIJAY SODIWALA OF WIRELESS INFRASTRUCTURE GROUP TALK TO RLI ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES IN HELPING THE UK'S LARGEST SHOPPING CENTRES DELIVER A FIRST CLASS MOBILE EXPERIENCE TO THEIR SHOPPERS.

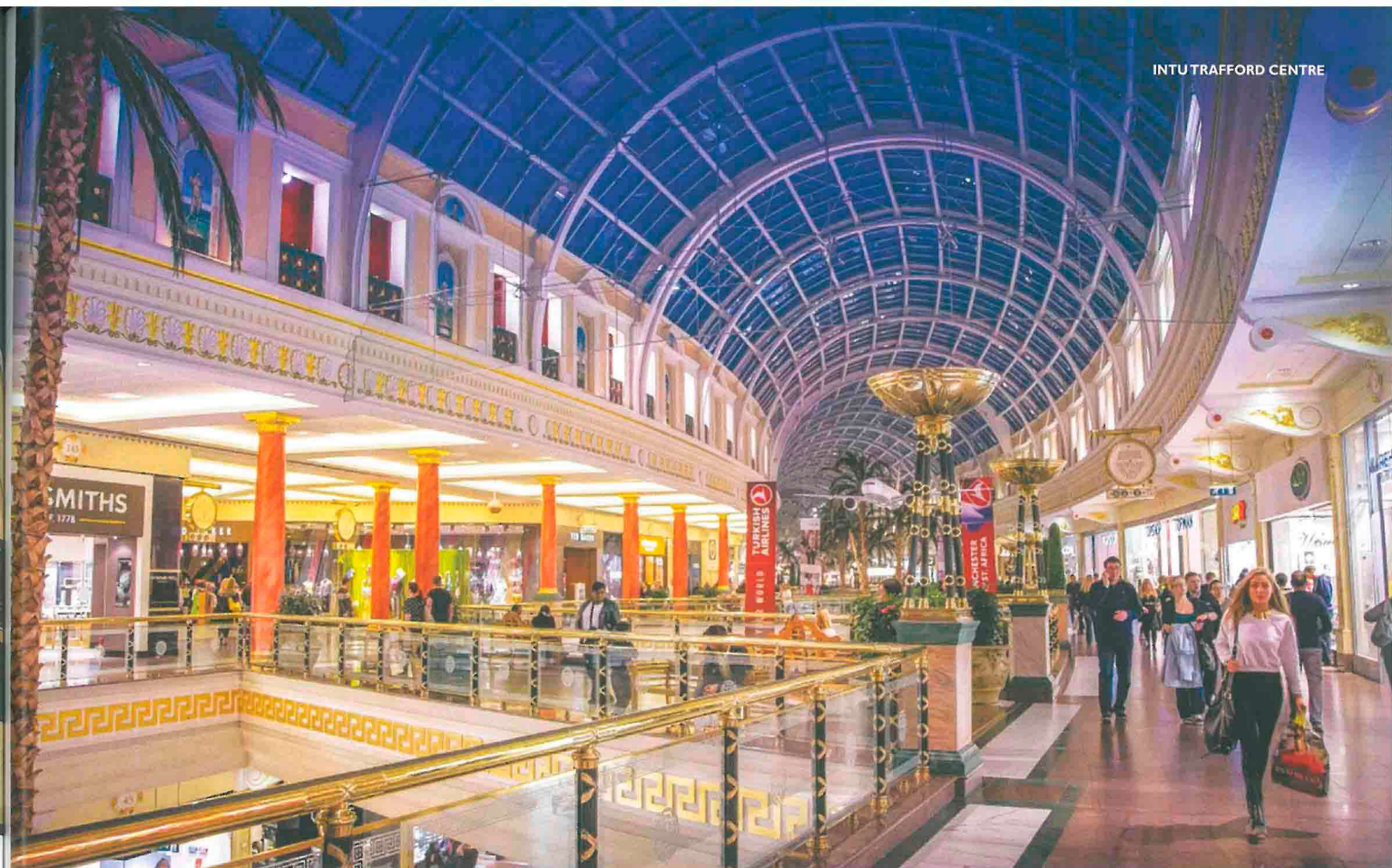
Picture this – a family out shopping on a busy Saturday afternoon in one of the largest and busiest shopping centres in the UK. What's going to keep them happy and what's going to keep them there?

“Well of course, the retail experience is key,” says Birchenough, “but what makes up that experience? Increasingly, its technology and the way it's used to make the centre more usable and shopper friendly. In part, that means giving customers the best mobile experience they can get and just as good as they get outdoors. With almost everyone owning a mobile phone these days, receiving a good service has become an expectation and the shopping centre environment is no longer immune to this.”

“But shopping centres aren't designed to improve the mobile signal

indoors,” says Sodiwala. “In fact, they do the reverse, with modern construction materials such as energy-saving glass preventing the outdoor mobile signal penetrating the building effectively. Add to that, large numbers of people flowing into a shopping centre and increasing dwell times and you see even more pressure on an already weakened signal. That's why a dedicated indoor solution which is dimensioned to the centre and its customers is required. We call this an Indoor Distributed Network.”

“If I go back to the example of the family out shopping for the day, and if you excuse the stereotyping so I can make the point,” says Birchenough with a smile, “then what's going to keep them there and happy will be: dad checking the football results on his mobile phone whilst enjoying a coffee; mother and daughter sending each other pictures of party outfits they'd



like to buy for the event they've got coming up, and a son who's quite happy to stream catch-up TV, listen to music and check in on social media whilst relaxing in the foodcourt.

"Now you can see where I'm going with this, everyone's happy, it's keeping them there and while the retail experience has changed the primary reason for them being there hasn't. More importantly, they'll keep coming back as long as their experience remains better than other centres they might otherwise frequent. That's why our venue partners point to improvements in dwell time and footfall as noticeable benefits following the deployment of our networks – as well as being an important utility or hygiene factor it's also a key enabler for breaking down the offline and online shopping divide."

"By offering our shoppers 4G we are further breaking down the division between online and offline shopping and giving our retailers a really exciting opportunity to engage with their shoppers, interacting with them at every level."

"With half the UK population visiting an intu branded shopping centre each year, and over a million customers a day, providing continuous and consistent 4G mobile connections is crucial. Wireless Infrastructure Group has a strong track record in this area and the benefits their networks provide will be welcomed by our customers."

Trevor Pereira, Commercial Director, intu Properties plc

Wireless Infrastructure Group's (WIG's) Indoor Distributed Networks business has had a tremendously successful five years. Its first project was at intu Trafford Centre in Manchester, the UK's second-largest shopping centre and host to over 31 million visitors each year.

"When you're working with the second-largest shopping centre in the UK as your first project, it certainly focuses the mind," says Birchenough. "After this we've gone on to deploy our Indoor Distributed Networks across the remainder of



Intu's UK centres as well as a range of other high footfall venues including skyscrapers, office campuses, holiday villages and stadiums. We've used the same approach throughout – commercially, operationally and technically."

WIG is no stranger to building up a credible business quickly, having developed a portfolio of more than 2,000 shared communication infrastructure sites across the UK, Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands over the past ten years. In 2012, WIG attracted major investment from two of the world's largest global investor groups, providing the company with long-term and low-cost capital to invest in enabling connectivity, through indoor and outdoor networks, in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

On the commercial side of things, Sodiwala is quick to point out WIG's unique go to market model and says that in general the approach at

each venue is that "WIG funds, designs, builds and manages a single, shared infrastructure platform that supports all mobile network operators on day one. We invest heavily in our infrastructure to enable the venue, its customers, staff and retail tenants to receive the best possible service across all technologies including 2G, 3G & 4G."

WIG now leads the UK for the deployment of such systems and the business is going from strength to strength. With over 80 per cent of mobile traffic (voice and data) originating indoors and with mobile device users increasingly dependent on dedicated network access for work and leisure, you can see why. WIG has now commenced its market entry activities in Western Europe with active discussions with the largest shopping centre operators in those markets.

"Whilst the cultures are different the requirement is the same – being able to deploy and manage a shared infrastructure platform that gives the best-in-class mobile experience at any shopping centre makes shoppers happy and keeps them coming back," says Sodiwala.

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