

# ANALYSIS

## Why shopping centres need Wi-Fi

Based on exclusive research from a new Retail Week report, **Isobel Chillman** examines how the UK's top centre operators are using Wi-Fi to capitalise on untapped potential

**V**irtual reality and artificial intelligence may be the trends du jour, but physical purchasing cannot be left out of discussions regarding the digital age of retail.

In Retail Week's new report, in association with Yardi, we spoke directly to 11 of the UK's leading shopping centre specialists to uncover their technological strategies and investments for enhancing consumer engagement.

Free Wi-Fi was the stand-out technology feature, with 88% of respondents naming it as their top priority in order to better serve visitors.

We look at the key ways centre operators are utilising this piece of everyday tech to maximise profits for their tenants and shareholders.

### 1. Providing a seamless multi-channel experience

In the age of constant connectivity, consumers expect to breeze between online and in-store without barriers.

As one respondent said: "The landlord's role will become that of a facilitator between physical and social sales platforms."

But with the ever-growing reliance on internet purchasing, consumers need more reasons to feel that the shopping centre is still significant to them.

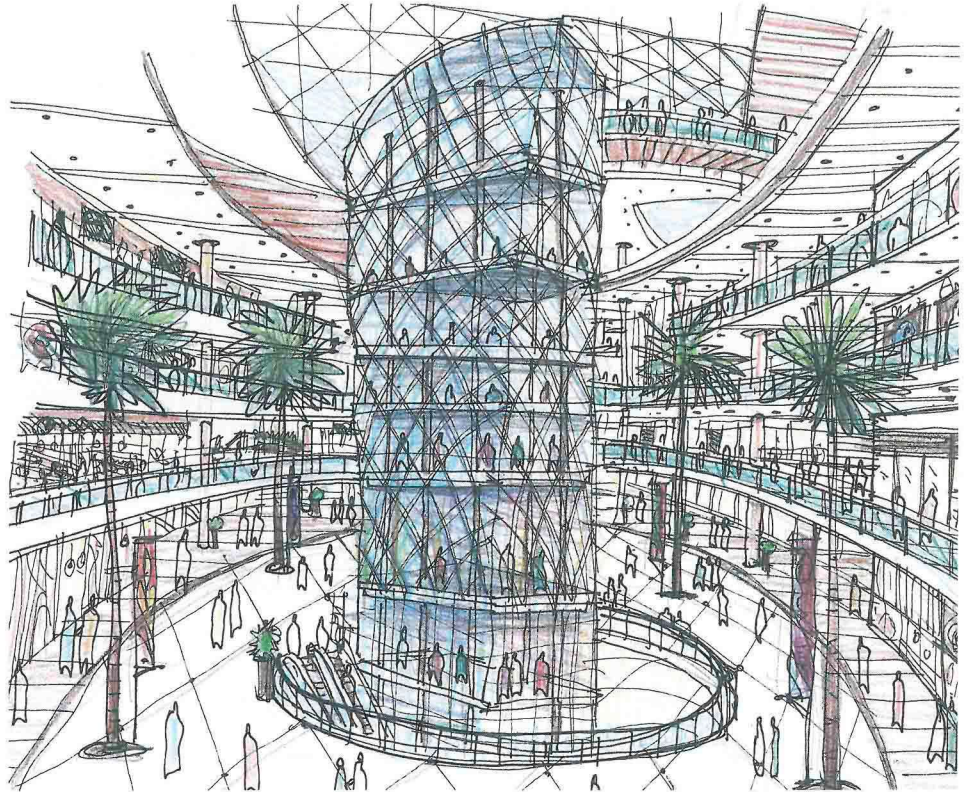
Free Wi-Fi encourages consumers to digitally interact with retailers without fear of exceeding their data limits. The ability to quickly download loyalty apps or pay digitally, rather than queuing for a checkout, helps to ensure that the retail experience is agile and contemporary.

But some operators no longer view Wi-Fi as a benefit but as a prerequisite. "Some providers are very costly and we challenge whether the return on investment is great enough to warrant the cost," said one operator. "But, if we removed it, it would immediately date our centres."

### 2. Obtaining invaluable consumer data

The retail sector is reliant on data, and getting to know who your consumers is essential.

Endless statistics on consumer shopping habits and demographics can be sourced from



loyalty apps, and the rate of Wi-Fi connections can be monitored to provide an indication of uptake, helping centre operators make refinements to centre websites.

Interpreting this data provides key insights for centre operators to integrate into their asset management strategies, helping to refine tenant mix and use as evidence in tenant negotiations.

In the words of one leading shopping centre specialist: "We use data capture to better understand our assets' catchments and customer demographics, and to measure footfall flow and spending patterns in detail across our portfolio.

"When we bring this together with our customer surveys, we have invaluable insight into our customers and rich data that tracks how we are doing over time."

### 3. Personalising communications with your customers

The data harvested through Wi-Fi log-ins and retailer apps can then be used to personalise content and events, in order to keep your customers coming back.

By reinforcing this with direct emails, text messages, representation on social media and targeted digital advertising, it can improve the digital connection between centre and visitor.

Increasing the regularity of contact allows retailers to tailor communications to particular groups, maximising their shopping trips.

One survey respondent said: "We always look to support our retailers with highly targeted and effective marketing opportunities.

"Current areas of focus are automated newsletters and personalising communications by leveraging data... consumer research has provided some clear areas of focus for us."

Only by truly understanding your customers do you then know how to interact with them.

By sharing this knowledge with retailers, centre operators can help their tenants exploit the retail space available, creating higher profits and lowering vacancy risks. **rw**

## Download the report

Hear from the UK's leading shopping centre specialists in *Unleashing Shopping Centre profitability*, in association with Yardi, and find out:

- Which customer-facing technologies work in harmony with bricks and mortar to maximise space and provide personalised experiences
- How to use innovative technology platforms to enhance customer engagement
- How to unleash the benefits of data to have a positive impact on the bottom line and generate returns for investors.

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