

Menlyn Park raises stakes in retail innovation

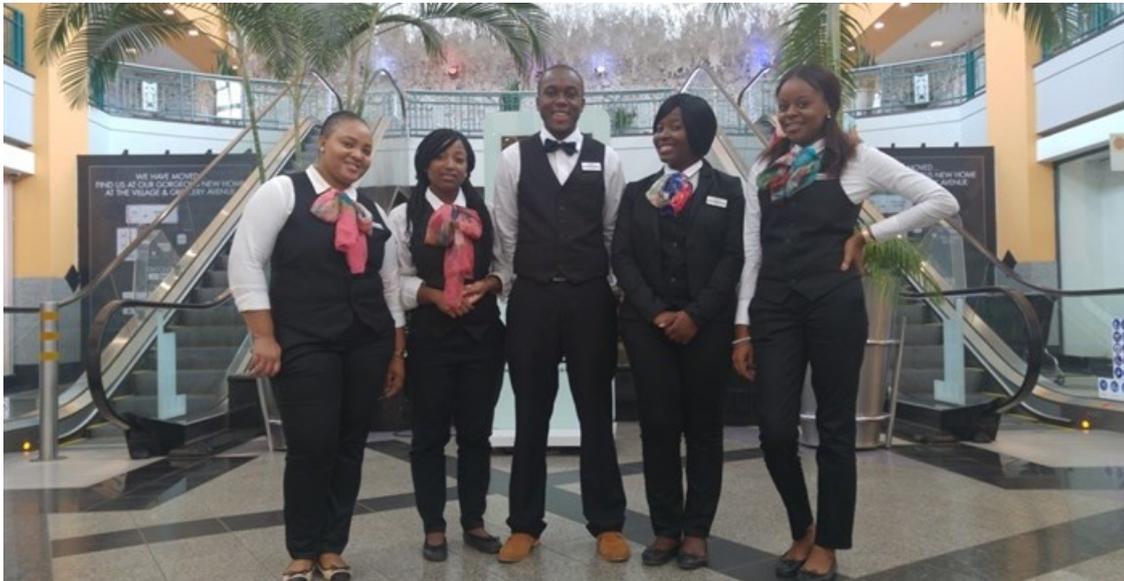
 By Louise Marsland

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Menlyn Park regional shopping centre, situated in the heart of the diplomatic sector in Pretoria, is undergoing a R2bn redevelopment that will add 50,000m² additional retail space, making it one of the largest malls in Africa.

Part of the redevelopment will be enhanced services for customers that will make the retail experience a VIP one for some. From a concierge service to personal shoppers, a tourist welcome centre, VIP parking and a VIP lounge, technology upgrades to give consumers a gig of free downloads a day and communicate directly with shoppers in store and in the mall, are on the cards.

The first such innovation has already been launched to mitigate the anticipated frustration shoppers might feel at shopping on what is, currently, a construction site. The Menlyn Park Concierge Ambassadors are there to assist shoppers during the phase two expansion which is underway. They have been so popular, that their numbers were boosted from six to 12, said Menlyn Park marketing manager, Andrea de Witt.



Menlyn Park concierges

Personal touch

The brainchild of Primedia Unlimited's shopping centre marketing specialists, Primedia Lifestyle Marketing Services, the concierge crew are stationed at the busiest nodes of the mall to assist shoppers during trading hours, seven days a week, with anything they may require, within the bounds of the law of course.

“We know that any refurbishment project, especially in a busy retail environment can be frustrating and adversely affect the number of shoppers through our doors, which is why we chose to be proactive,” says Tanja Gerber, regional marketing manager for Primedia Lifestyle Marketing Services.

“They are stationed primarily at three main areas of the centre, namely the existing centre; the Village, which is our temporary 18 month mall; and the Grocery Avenue which covers most of our food and grocery outlets.”

It is this personal touch which De Witt feels is still so necessary in customer service to shoppers, despite advancements in technology. “Our concierges are helping people with their shopping, helping with directions... their job description was anything a customer wants them to do, as long as it is within the law!

“There are stories of them going above and beyond, there are pensioners who find their favourite concierge and make them shop with them for the morning. They have made a huge difference.

“We do in-depth customer service training, it is not just about knowing where to find Edgars, for example, but to know what brands Edgars stocks. We have weekly meetings and updates, they are given research and give us great feedback. They tell us what customers keep asking for, what they don't like, whether they love the new tiles, and so on.

“We have ideas that came through them, from customers, like a ‘rent-a-pram’ service, which we wouldn't have thought of before.”

The personal touch will also extend to dedicated VIP schemes with free parking, a concierge touch point, wider bays, a VIP Valet area with a lounge; a personal shopper service which can be booked through the marketing department; and a Welcome Centre with luxury shopper services aimed at visiting tourist and diplomatic delegations, and manned full time by the concierge team, joined by SA Tourism and SA Police.

Facial recognition

These shopper experiences don't exclude innovations in shopper marketing, with new interactive technologies on the cards, including a “heat map” to show where shoppers are congregating; and “sentiment trackers” based on facial expressions to tap into customers' emotions during their shopper experience. The entire mall will be wifi-ready at launch, where in partnership with Internet Solutions, Menlyn Park will offer a free gig a day for every customer throughout the centre. This offer is already available in the food court at the mall.

“We have also introduced three LED Cylindrical screens with a full content management system, so we won't just blast shoppers with advertising, but will have filtered social media content involving our shoppers, interactive marketing campaigns and all our social media handles displayed for live customer engagement.”

Apart from upgraded customer service and innovative technologies, Menlyn Park is upping the infrastructure ante, by constructing a 3000m² open air, central park on the upper level, flanked by restaurants. Over 200 new shops – local and international brands – have been added.

Three areas of the major reconstruction project have been opened up already to shoppers: the reworked old food court, which is now the new fashion wing with global fashion brands; a new grocery area, ‘Grocery Avenue’, with the three major food retailers (Pick n Pay, Checkers, Food Lovers); and the old events arena has been revamped into a new food and entertainment court.

The existing mall is now building out to reach Grocery Avenue.

Menlyn Park Shopping Centre is owned by Pareto Limited, which is investing R2bn in the redevelopment of Menlyn Park.

Completion is scheduled for November 2016.

[Primedia Lifestyle Marketing Services](#) is part of Primedia Unlimited's subsidiary, the Primedia Lifestyle Group, and provides shopper marketing services to more than 40 shopping centres nationwide, from convenience centres to super-regionals.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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