



Centre of Leidsche Rijn heavily invests in innovation with one sole purpose:

From the left: Bart Schmitz, Tom Hilderink and Rogier Hendriks at the construction site of Leidsche Rijn Centre

IMAGE: SCN

Binding the customer by offering an optimal experience

Quite regularly a.s.r. Vastgoed Projecten invites the press to witness the construction of the mega project Leidsche Rijn Centre (LRC). This time SCN got an exclusive briefing on the innovation process that has such an important and distinctive role during this development. What is the purpose of this development and what will the entrepreneurs and customers notice once it's operating?

Rogier Hendriks and Tom Hilderink, who both work for a.s.r. Vastgoed Projecten do the talking whilst giving a tour on the construction site during one of those rare Indian summer days in September. Bart Schmitz from PFM, one of the partners in the Innovation Platform, joins us to explain the technical part. Apart from the public wifi network and the counting systems, PFM also delivers the technical framework for the innovations we are about to witness. First of all: how is the development of LRC coming along? Tom Hilderink (leasing and innovation): 'Our plan is to open all 130 shops at ones in May 2018. We have now rented out nearly 70%, including big names such as Jumbo Foodmarket, H&M, Mango, Jack&Jones, Vero Moda, Hunkemöller and Vapiano. In fact, a great deal of the tenant mix is already secured and what we're looking for now is mostly smaller shopping formulas with a slightly higher positioning.'

Rogier Hendriks (Commercial Director): 'After a difficult start (the development started just as the economic crisis began, edit.) we have experienced a nice development over the last few years with many new names in the retail business. For retailers it's becoming clearer what we are creating here: a mega development with housing, shops and offices. In a part of the city that already houses 82.000 people and that is still growing up to 100.000. In a couple of years this city will be similar in size to Delft or Leeuwarden!'

THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY AS A GUIDELINE FOR WHAT IS BEING MADE UP

For a while now housing in LRC has greatly benefited from the growing market and houses are practically selling themselves. This will have a positive effect on the retailers planning to open a shop here next year: they serve a target group consisting of double-income couples and young families with an income far above average.

On the other hand these new residents will find a fully equipped shopping area here, in which the developer has set the intention to do everything right. Rogier Hendriks: 'So not just the tenant mix and the shopping route and the architecture (we sometimes work with as many as four architects per building block), the parking, simply everything is executed correctly. To make sure we make

explains Rogier Hendriks. 'We are doing this with one sole purpose and that is to offer the customer an optimal experience while visiting LRC. To achieve this, we need an overall approach and we need to facilitate our entrepreneurs as best we can, while exploiting their shops. Off-line shopping should simply be fun, but we do need to be online and have the connection with the web.'

Even though LRC hasn't opened yet, this new approach has already been adopted. Although the houses are still un-lived in and the shops haven't opened yet, the project is already being followed by 13.000 people. The involvement is huge. The future customer is looking forward to what's coming and is even asking for specific shops. But what else will this consumer be able to experience once LRC has opened? Let's make a small leap to the technical part of the story.

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The innovation platform ensures that data serves the shopping centre



the most of it, we created an innovation platform in which the customer journey is the focal point.

The development team realised that this customer journey doesn't start when the consumer arrives at the Shopping Centre, but a long time before that, starting on the couch at home. As a Shopping Centre who wishes to provide the best experience for their customer, we would like to take the whole customer journey into account. 'But we are not innovating just to innovate,'

TECHNIQUE THAT IS FUTURE PROOF

Bart Schmitz: 'Our role in this project is a lot bigger than just installing a system to count customers. Of course we will install this here as well, but early in the development of LRC, we were asked what would be necessary to implement a complete counting and wifi system. The request was that the customers could be counted per shop. And the wifi for the customers had to be state of the art with a perfect wifi range throughout the centre. Also, the tech-

The Customer Journey at Leidsche Rijn Centre (impression)

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*‘LRC is basically
 the shopping centre
 of 2020’*



The making of the Brusselplein

nical infrastructure had to have the ability to adjust to future developments. That is why we have developed a cabling model based on a grid through the entire area. Each location can be connected by a 2.5 km long glass fibre cable and thirteen connector cabinets. During the construction phase the necessary spare conduits have been installed and these can already be seen terminating at shops.’

A technical story, but what’s important to acknowledge is that everything one wishes for now and in the future, can be connected. ‘So, everything from the “internet of things”, to narrow casting, music, camera’s and anything you can think of,’ Bart Schmitz claims.

Rogier Hendriks notices that this is merely the starting point: ‘Innovation does not stop with the completion of the project. Obviously we don’t know what the future looks like, but we do know that there will be a lot of changes. We made sure that the foundation is solid so that later, we can connect anything the customer or retailer desires or needs. So, when the retailer wishes to use our network for his application, that will be possible. The same goes for security, the police, parking etcetera.’

DATA MAKES SO MUCH MORE POSSIBLE

Parking. Not a popular subject among customers. A necessary evil? An issue the innovation platform also considered and partner IP-parking decided to completely change the traditional parking model. So, no more ticket machines, no traditional parking management that mainly focuses on technical failures in refilling tickets.

At LRC things will be very different. Linked to their own loyalty system the customer can easily save up points for free parking. Rogier Hendriks: ‘Innovation partner MyOrder knows all about loyalty and created an app especially. Not only does this enable the customer to save up for free parking, the app also makes it possible for us to make personalised offers. This last part is something our partner WebPower specialises in. At LRC we will be gathering data in many ways. IT company Cap



Bart Schmitz (l), Rogier Hendriks and Tom Hilderink look at an LRC info panel.

Gemini (which is situated around the corner) will help us to analyse that data. Our aim is to translate this information into a means that will help retailers improve running their business.’

PFM too has been focusing on how to use data for consumer analysis. Bart Schmitz: ‘Via our counting system we can accumulate a lot more than merely the number of customers and their movements. In the UK we already have the experience of measuring male/female ratio and whether someone is happy or not.’

Aha, but that’s tricky, isn’t it? Because only recently a well-known media operator was on the news because of the camera’s it had assembled in billboards. That stirred

things up quite a bit amongst society. Bart Schmitz: ‘Listen, technique is always ahead of regulation. But we will always make sure our systems are equipped.’

AN ORGANISATION COMPATIBLE WITH THE TECHNIQUE

Tim Hilderink points out that technique is merely a tool: ‘In the end our goal is to make sure that all the benefits we offer the customer here, will make him prefer to shop at LRC instead of on his couch at home, because the ultimate shopping experience is something that the internet still can’t offer. Innovations due to new techniques can help enhance this experience and various retailers have indicated they are openminded about this.’

‘The key is to trigger today’s consumer, to reward him and to stimulate him to come back. But you must facilitate this in the correct way. That’s why we hired a mall

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*‘The key is to trigger today's
 consumer, to reward him and to
 stimulate him to come back’*

manager long before the opening. He also participates in the innovation platform and somehow he creates the link between retailers and consumers. Technicians can make it all up, in the end it must work in a day-to-day reality. LRC is clearly in the lead when it comes to these technical developments and we are proud that we are basically creating shopping centre 2.0 or the shopping centre of 2020.’

A SIMPLE EXAMPLE

So how does that work in practice? A simple example. The gathered data (‘datapool’) of the shopping area, the shop entrances and the parking garage makes it possible to, for example, make a link with the school holidays in Leidsche Rijn or the weather predictions.

Rogier Hendriks: ‘This way we can make a prediction for the ice cream seller how many customers he can expect the following day. He can then optimise his ice cream making preparations, as well as his staff planning. This will then lead to shorter waiting times at the counter and therefore lead to happier customers. The technique is here to serve commerce and, in the end, to serve the customer. That is what it’s all about for us.’

But before that’s all up and running, a lot of water must flow through the (Leidsche) Rijn. And cables must be pulled through conduits. Bart Schmitz: ‘LRC is definitely one of our most complex assignments of the past years. Not just because of the layout, but also because of its size and obviously because of the innovation that is being pursued here. The linking of data streams and implementing these is quite difficult, especially since PFM has taken more and more factors into account.’

‘But the overall picture is absolutely delightful and amazing to be able to work with!’ ←

An overview of the project

