

The shopping centre is dead. Long live the shopping centre.

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Every year nine million people view the Mona Lisa. People still flock to live events at stadiums. Why; when they can see it on video, in HD and 3D and AR, etc. "Technology is always with us, but despite this we still want to go to shopping centres, stadiums, we still want to touch and feel ... even kiss," says Andy Stalman.



Andy Stalman

A writer, lecturer, entrepreneur and university professor and one of the world's top branding specialists, Stalman was in South Africa recently, in Sandton, where he spoke about global retail trends and the future of retail in the digital era.

For 60 years the shopping centre industry has remained the same worldwide. "The reality is that most shopping centres in the United States (US) were boring, ignored customers, and did not care, and therefore they closed. Not because of technology," he explains.

Understand and respond to change

"But now shopping centres are changing," he adds. "They are moving from transactional centres to an immersive experience. Customers no longer want to be customers, they want to be guests and when they step through the doors of a shopping centre, they want to be treated as a king."

But this requires shopping centres to deal with change and understand how spaces are changing. "Change is about watching what is happening and watching the new behaviours of people. In Spain in some cities pedestrian walk/stop signals are at mid-body height because people are always on their phones. If you want to understand change, you need to see what is happening," says Stalman.

You also need to understand that is no difference between e-commerce and physical commerce. "There is only retail. We must be the same whether the customer is connected online or present physically. The customer is the same person, so we need to stop talking about online and offline. Brands in the 21st Century must be online and offline or they will be out," he says.



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Stand for something

People are demanding emotional experiences from brands and support brands that stand for something. "Brands need to understand it is time not to be important, but to do what is important to improve people and the society they live in."

Shopping centres also must do this, and, he says, if they do then the people will care and respect and love you because you are caring about them.

If shopping centres connect with communities and societies and be impactful in them, then they will grow. "It is not enough to have spectacular architecture; it is what happens inside the architecture. Offer an experience every week, and then you will define yourself not as real estate but as entertainment," he explains.



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Create inspiring spaces

He cites an example where they transformed the corridor to the bathroom in a shopping centre. "These corridors are always never-ending and ugly, but most people use a bathroom at a shopping centre. We created a screen to identify the movement of people and reflects your image through light. You move, and it mirrors you. People loved it and flocked to the centre.

"This is being creative, and the future of retail is inspiring and emotional spaces that surprise and connect with people."

It is no longer good enough to have great products, the experience is as important. "People all around the world are not buying products; they are buying experiences. Shopping centres need to have superb experiences to attract customers. Think of Lush, Lego and Nespresso and the experiences they offer in their stores," he says.



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“Bricks is one thing and emotions is another, but the two can work together. For many years bricks were the star, today the people are the star attraction,” he says.

“We are seeing a rebirth of bricks and mortar, but one that is not boring or unfriendly and includes digital and physical to make the shopping centre an experience.”

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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