

High Street FM

What's on the retail shopping list?

The current retail climate is hard to read. Tesco's latest figures are up on last year, Kingfisher's are down. Simon Wolfson, celebrated young Chief Executive of Next freely admits the long-term retail outlook looks difficult. But then it has just been announced that Liberty International, who own the giant Metrocentre and Lakeside retail sites, and Land Securities are happily masterminding a new £500 million retail complex for Cardiff City Centre.

However, one thing we can be certain of is that the high street retailer is becoming ever more competitive. Margins are tight, and competition from areas such as the internet are growing. Understandably, the retail sector is looking eagerly to save money and increase effectiveness through the outsourcing of FM. But, there is another reason for the outsourcing strategy, and that is the ongoing aim to create the ideal shopping experience, by providing the customer with the optimum environment, ensures they stay long enough in shops to part with their money.

Romec's Keith Howarth spotlights the reasons for change.

"In the past, many retailers employed the philosophy that 'the cheapest supplier is the best supplier'. They also suffered from a certain disorganisation of their own repair and maintenance systems. I believe that most high street clients have had to re-write their own FM strategies and in doing so have identified what they require. Certainly in security terms clients want a quality service at value for money. Clients want a proactive service and the supply of innovative solutions that keep them in control against rising retail crime. For instance, the new improved daily communication and reporting that we supply with our remote monitoring has won many friends."

Romec have an increasing rota of retail sector clients that stretch from Safeway, Dixons and Boots to Debenhams, Leeds and Holbeck Building Society and WHSmith.

Keith, "The promise of up-to-date security solutions is essential but it is only one part of the

variety of services that are now important to retailers.

"The supreme effort needed to maintain market share does not allow retailers the time to concentrate on running all their own 'up to the mark' facilities. However, a retailer's mission is to provide the best shopping experience to the customer, every aspect from the outside signage to the cleanliness and heating, to the performance of the tills, has to be perfect every hour of every day. It would seem that clients fully understand the attraction of outsourcing their FM to suppliers who can prove they have the constant ability to provide 100% back-up and bespoke solutions."

It is this need to have all non-core business 'headaches' taken away and at the same time provide the customer with a warm, attractive and safe shopping environment that sees retailers seek out new value added FM innovations.

Tony Bates is the Romec Account Manager who is responsible for our relationship with a number of retail and retail finance clients. Tony explains, "We have just installed a brand new CCTV provision in two new high profile retail stores. The digital system works via an office pc, allowing the store management instant access to what is going on in their branches at any time. We have incorporated a specialist system that records everything on to hard disc and one they can move and operate their cameras at will. Retailers are top flight modern companies, they and their FM managers insist on the very highest standards, and recognise the influence that good design and appearance ultimately have on the customer and their perception of the retail brand."

Tony believes that the retail sector is open to cross selling, but only to suppliers who are perceived to have a quality service. Tony explains, "You're only as good as your last job and the modern retailer closely monitors the key performance indicators. However, if you're proving your worth today, you would expect to be able to tender for other services tomorrow."

Happiness is a hot rod

A day in the life of... John Bowen is a driven man who drives a full life.



The first car he drove was a Rolls Royce (his parents were in service and he was allowed to back the Rolls out of the garage on the estate before washing it.) Ever since, he has had a love affair with all types of transport and his next special car will be the Jaguar S Type, already hired, to be tried and tested on his next visit to the States.

side of companies in a way they can relate to. I understand the issues they face and I can 'package' things in a way that benefits them.

chequered flagman on BBC's televised rally cross at Lydden Hill in the 70s, and is a regular official at Brands Hatch.

And what about his current motoring ambitions? – to drive the Daytona circuit in a Dodge Intrepid and to own a Chrysler Prowler – the new hot rod. But first, he's taking flying lessons and teaching himself the electric guitar.

Any spare time left, John and his wife, Fay, spend on family matters and planning holidays. They have four children, two girls and two boys. The eldest son is married and lives in Philadelphia, working for AT&T. Their eldest daughter, who was a fashion designer for Burberry's, now lives in Australia where she runs her own exclusive fashion and jewellery business.

In the mid nineties when John and Fay took their two youngest children to Disney in Florida, they fell in love with America which they now visit three times a year and will retire to the Gulf Coast near Tampa.

At the weekends, you may well find John reading up on his other great interest, that of industrial history.

"I'm a great believer in getting the very best out of the day. My interest in social and industrial history is always stimulated by travelling round the UK and through new contacts at work. In my younger days I had more active weekend pursuits, playing a lot of football until my eyesight failed and then I became a qualified referee – just proving the old adage that 'the referee has got to be blind!'"

"As I say, I think I'm very lucky. I'm an optimist and when I go to bed, I'm already looking forward to what the next day is going to bring. And for that perfect dream – well I'm in a Chevrolet Monte Carlo on poll position at Daytona..."

A typical morning in John Bowen's life could see him driving a more moderate Peugeot 406, on his way to an early morning visit to a Romec client's mailroom. As Head of Client Solutions, John, 49, is responsible for providing business service solutions to Romec customers as part of the overall answer to their FM needs.

John, "Romec are seen as being highly professional facilities management providers, especially in the area of soft FM where we are looking at support beyond traditional FM products. My background in purchasing and logistics has helped me in what I do today. Logistics is all about detail and keeping things simple, elements that are the key to success when looking for answers that help businesses perform better."

"An increasing number of clients are looking for business services as well as facilities management and I look to tailor value-added innovations beyond their initial requirements. I am also involved in securing new business. Our approach involves thinking strategically about how we can help our clients deliver their business objectives and keep their customers happy. Here again, having been a professional buyer is helpful as I can talk to people on the purchasing

"We are proactive in searching out new business and, if through research or networking, we can identify a client need that has not been answered we will look to a bespoke solution. If we can't supply a certain service, we are happy to introduce them to other suppliers who can help them. I always think it is encouraging when we can see how our thinking and approach has influenced clients. We are certainly being recognised as a very innovative company, both in the way we supply technology and also in our thinking."

The busy life suits John, a jolly person whose motto is 'try to get a laugh out of every working day'.

"I'm very lucky, I love my job. I'm currently working on two new bids in the retail and financial sectors and I'm also putting together some computer aided facility management software as part of our recent FM contract success in Northern Ireland."

Indeed, John, a self confessed 'fiend for transport' has driven almost everything on wheels including a 'Black 5' mainline steam engine, a military amphibious vehicle across the river in Boston, and a veritable smorgasbord of cars stretching from Ford racing cars to American classics. A regular at the Daytona 500 in the US, John was also the