

MORE THAN A SHOP

The future of the UK's high streets

Debbie Robinson
Central England Co-operative

Rhian Thomas
IGD

Also featuring:
Headingley Development Trust



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Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Hello and welcome to More Than a Shop, hosted by me Elizabeth Alker. We're welcoming guests with something new and radical to say about the big issues of the day. Well the flavour of the series is a search for new alternative ideas in the spirit of the worldwide co-operative movement, which happens to started in my hometown of Rochdale.

Well, co-ops proudly offer radical alternatives to mainstream ways of getting things done. They are indeed so much more than a shop.

Well, today we're looking at the future of the high streets, which was so long formed the hub of many towns and cities, but which of course has been in serious trouble thanks to fierce competition from internet shopping.

Joining me here we have two expert guests. If you'd like to introduce yourselves please ladies.

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Good morning. My name is Debbie Robinson. I'm the Chief Executive for Central England Co-op. It's a truly co-operative co-op and one of the largest independents in the country. We provide worthwhile employment to 8000 colleagues in 16 counties across England.

Rhian Thomas, IGD

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**MORE THAN
A SHOP**

Good morning. I'm Rhian Thomas and I have the honour of leading the Shopper Insight team at IGD. IGD is a body that exists for the good of the food and grocery industry around the world. I have the privilege of talking to British food and grocery shoppers every single day about what they're doing and why they're doing it.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Fantastic, thank you both very much. And thank you for joining us.

So Debbie, to start with you, what does being CEO of Central England Co-operative entail? How close are you to the shop floor and hands on with what's going on in stores.

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

So I've got a dream job, because I love shopping. And I love shops. I love colleagues in stores. So I probably spend two or three days a week, admittedly, a lot of that's at the weekend shop. And I get paid. So that's absolutely fantastic. But one of the real important things for me is just looking at the opportunities where the co-op can actually add a real difference. So we put a lot of emphasis on new initiatives. So in our latest stores, we've, I say obviously got water refilling opportunities, but we've done that in a really neat way. Which is using the drainage as part of the refrigeration. So it's really cost-effective. We've got cycle repair stations and free air. So free air and free water, and really the greatest toilets. So we've put a lot of emphasis in looking at public facilities. And I think some of the challenges on our high streets has been things we've taken for granted in the past just aren't there anymore. So we know all of our new stores and refitted stores we've got great toilet facilities. And in some of the medium and larger community stores, we've got baby feeding facilities, as well as obviously baby changing facilities in all of them. We see the pubs have closed, and we're really trying to create the hub of the community.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So public toilets – that's something that customers use you found customers were wanting? There was a need for it?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Well definitely – me included! And I remember shopping with small children and actually you have to plan your entire journey around “Well, let's make sure we can take care of everyone's needs.” And I shop now with my mum, and that's another big consideration. We go before we start the shop, but we actually do, it influences the choices that we're making. And of course, the internet of things hasn't yet found a solution to that. So we're really thinking about what are the human needs, and how we can then start to recreate community – possibly in a different way than it's been done in the past.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And the high street just stops looking after those things, then.

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Absolutely. And I think it is down to the essential services. And almost we are a fourth emergency service because we're providing the essentials of food and drink in the communities in which we serve. But there's so much more that we need to do and toilet facilities are just part of it. We're also working at looking at community space and cafes in our stores. And we're about to launch that in one of our stores in Littleover near Derby really soon.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And Rhian, are you recognizing a lot of this? As an analyst, your focus is the consumer as well, isn't it?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

Yeah absolutely. So my focus and my team's focus is understanding what shoppers are doing and why. I guess why and how the industry can best suit their needs and meet their needs. So it's really interesting to hear Debbie talk about that. I think the initial thing that kind of came to mind there was how people use these spaces differently now. So you mentioned some seating areas. So how many people do we see in these environments working – actually choosing to use stores, spaces in that way. And things like toilet facilities, Wi-Fi facilities are actually really important to enable things like that for people to use the new kind of third space, if you like.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

When you say working, you mean out of the office actually, working in a shop.

Rhian Thomas, IGD

As a researcher for IGD I can attest that a lot of us spend a lot of time working in shops. Because, you know, we're out and about talking to shoppers visiting new concepts. We need places to work on the go. And we have our favourite go to stores for just that, because it's where it works for us.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So obviously, you both been looking at the challenges and opportunities facing the high street right now. What is the biggest challenge? What's the thing that's most pressing?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

Yeah, I guess from my perspective, looking at what shoppers are doing, I guess the biggest challenge for the high street is from the shoppers' side, the plethora of choice and environments that they can visit to complete their food and grocery shopping means getting shopper loyalty is really difficult. Because, you know, our data suggests that shoppers are making 24 trips a month when it comes to food and grocery shopping. And that's before you even get into things like having a coffee to go etc. So, you know, that means that they are doing multiple missions at different times a day in different environments. And while they will often have preferences of where they go, they will often make choices on quite practical levels. Where am I? What am I near? Where am I going. And from a retailer's point of view, that means getting true shopper loyalty can be quite tricky.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So that's to do with geography – just basically how close things are...

Rhian Thomas, IGD

Yeah, physicality is a massive factor but also I think just how people are living their lives now. So when they want to be in these stores, I want to do my shopping at 7am at home on my sofa using an iPad, or I want to need to do it in 10 minutes in my lunch break. There are such diverse shopper needs and, actually, shoppers' expectations are very high now.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Yeah, I was going to say how have our expectations change. So previously, you know, we expect to be able to get everything at our fingertips.

Rhian Thomas, IGD

Yeah, I mean all of us carry around that mobile device that enables us to find out where everything is, how much it's gonna cost and when I can get it. So, you know, the expectations have been materially shifted

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

But, on the contrary, shops have been historically kind of focused maybe on one product or specialising in one area.

Rhian Thomas, IGD

Yeah, at IGD, we absolutely believe physical stores are core to food and grocery industry. So, 97% of British shoppers visit a large format store a month and 92% visit a convenience store. So, there is nothing to suggest that these physical stores do not have an incredibly vital role to play in the food and grocery market. It's just a sense of how they use them differently and what they expect from them.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay, and Debbie, as someone who shopping three-four times a week, do you recognise this? Have your expectations changed as well?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Oh, absolutely, they have. I think the real barriers and challenges that we have on the high street –business raise is really fundamental. So around our stores, we see great entrepreneurial thinking and lovely cafes that have been set up and bakers. And they're there for three to six months, and just simply can't afford to continue. And that isn't because the consumer doesn't want, it's because there are so many barriers to actually entering the high street. And I think parking's a real factor. So now edge of town and out of town you've got free parking.

Certainly at the centre of the thinking a Central England Co-op is about a 15 minute liveable community. And it's having everything accessible that you need. And as well as the water and the bicycle repair stuff that we talked about, we have introduced seating areas inside, outside. We've planted trees – an intrinsic part of creating that community spirit. We've done work and are looking at where spaces around our stores can be used to grow vegetables that become accessible to the community. So it truly is a hub and a place where people actually want to go. But I do think we need some government intervention to help remove some of the barriers that a really making it difficult to thrive on the high street.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And what is the scale of this problem? I and how hard are people working to address how much it's changed in a short amount of time.

Rhian Thomas, IGD

I think at IGD we are enthused by some of the initiatives that we see in the industry. So responding, as Debbie mentioned there, responding to different expectations and delivering for shoppers in that way. So, you know, making it easier for them to pay in efficient and effective ways. Making it easy for them to pre-order or to check what's in store. Making it easy for them to know what's contained within their products. We see lots of initiatives

in the UK, and globally, that we see as encouraging as responding to those shopper expectations. The challenge for everyone in the industry is keeping up with those shoppers because they won't stand still.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay, well, you've talked a little bit about how we can remain relevant and appeal to customers and consumers. Is the narrative important? You know, how you present yourself? If people can buy into the story behind your business or what you're selling or offering to consumers? Is that a big part of it?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

I think the story is really important, but the delivery is more important. So you can have the story, but I think you have to bring tangible benefits as well. So, you know, the "So what?" You know, why would I want to go there? I think that's really important. Of course, the co-op has a massive backstory, which people love, but you still have to be relevant in that moment and deliver to the consumer, what they're actually looking for.

So a lot of the work that we do is looking at smaller local suppliers that we're able to work really closely with. And they're brilliant at showcasing their products in our stores giving sampling opportunities. So people will go in and have some excitement around that. And that's creating the window for small producers to tell *their* particular story. And I think there's a halo effect for both co-ops and for independent entrepreneurs in that sense.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And it's something that consumers care about as well, that ethos those values.

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

They *really* do. And I know there are challenges around price. But of course price is only relevant if you're giving the consumer what they actually want. Because you think I want that, can I afford it? You don't think "how much have I got, what am I going to spend it on" when it comes to food and drink, and I think that's really important. And actually just having something new and different and exciting that actually does reflect them as a person and the community in which they live. So there are wonderful nuances between our towns, cities and villages. And we should actually be celebrating that. So for us in, our in our counties, the brewing industry is really important. So our community cafe will actually be licensed for on-trade. So it's a supermarket where you can have a craft ale, you can have a cheeky cocktail at the right time. And because we do recognize that. And they'll spend time with us. And I think that's really important.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And is the social aspects of being part of it as well, I guess? You know, people go out not just to shop, but maybe to see people that they know, and communicate and socialize?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Well we talk about social isolation, which obviously it's a problem. And it's a problem for so many people – for older people who find themselves on their own, but for younger people who just actually don't have the skills to go out. So we're really trying to say, let's not take the shopping to them, let's get them to come to us. And even if it means we provide an assisted shop. But I think the multi-generational benefits are really important too and we do a lot of work with our members. So we have 250,000 active co-operative members in our society. And we do an awful lot of work where playgroup presents to the care home. And they're rehearsing and it's absolutely wonderful. And of course, you then see the older people who are desperate to share their stories of their lives, and young people just lap it up. I think it's just so important that we don't lose that. So the traditionalists, as

they're classified, are now around 10%. But there'll be 3% by 2030. So how do we just make sure that we've got everything there – the people that have lived through World Wars – how do we capture all of that information and knowledge?

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay, and Rhian, is this something you know, speaking to consumers, do you feel they're buying into this kind of narrative, that that's important for them as well?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

Yeah, it's actually one of the trends that we're keeping a really close eye on. So we articulate it as being more looking to optimize their time. So there is absolutely a need to deliver the core needs when it comes to shopping – "I want to have what I need, when I need it at a price that I can afford". However, I also am interested in investing my time in things where there is something in it for me, so it might be enjoyment. So Debbie's cocktails, I'm quite excited to visit my store myself. You know, that's the place I want to be. I want to spend a bit of time because you've hopefully made the rest of my journey as easy and straightforward as possible. Therefore, now I've got this little bit of time, and I'm going to do something nice with it. And we see other retailers not just including grocery, but doing just that. Giving experiences in store and reasons for shoppers to invest their very precious time.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Well, one way to ensure your high streets has thriving shops rather than boarded up windows is to open shops yourselves – or at least as part of a community effort. The Headingley Development Trust in Leeds has done just that. And our producer Geoff Bird went along to find out more.

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

My name is Helen Seymour and I'm Chair of Headingley Development Trust, a resident led community-owned Community Benefit Society dedicated to the regeneration of Headingley.

Geoff Bird, producer

You know, we're in the nice warm headquarters here, which is a lovely building. There's a very busy cafe. But today we're here to talk about the high street.

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

Yes, we're a very strange area. Headingley is a very ancient village, but it's also an area that is very much dominated by students and a transient population. And so more take outs, more pubs, more cafes. But essentially, our role has been to regenerate Headingley mainly for the resident population.

Geoff Bird, producer

Okay, let's go and take a trip down the high street.

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

So there are some things that are very particular to Headingley. But presumably there are general issues that face high streets up and down the country as well.

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

Absolutely. We have big retailers moving in and so it means that small shops really can't survive.

Geoff Bird, producer

And so what's the alternative that you've proposed and that you've seen grow over the last few years?

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

Well, we started with setting up the farmers' market, which is monthly. And that happens on North Lane, which we're just coming into now. And it's a mixed group of landlords on North Lane. But in general, they want to see this part of Headingley thrive and they offer us fair rents.

Geoff Bird, producer

How does a co-operative model come into play here?

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

Well, after we set up the farmers' market, we were approached by the owners of the natural food store. They said to us, you know, we want to retire but we don't want the shop to disappear. So we had a community share issue. And we set up a co-operative of those members who'd invested in the natural food store. And now, 12 years old, that's still going strong. That is a community-owned co-operative, owned by those members. We have full-time staff, we provide five jobs. And it's a thriving business.

Geoff Bird, producer

The share option – the community share option – it's rather like a crowdfunder but the difference is, as well as raising capital, you also own it and you have a stake in it and make decisions.

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

Absolutely, now, the natural food store was set up with a small loan from Headingley Development Trust. And so it's very much a sister shop to our main shop, which is The Headingley Greengrocer. And my colleague Richard will talk about it in more detail.

Geoff Bird, producer

Can we talk about it inside because it's freezing?!

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

It's freezing there as well!

Geoff Bird, producer

Richard – tell me who you are then exactly.

Richard Norton, Headingley Development Trust

Okay. I'm Richard Norton. I'm one of the Directors of The Headingley Greengrocer.

Geoff Bird, producer

How long has it been running?

Richard Norton, Headingley Development Trust

We've been running this business since last April [2019]. But it has been a greengrocer on this site, we think for 100 years.

Geoff Bird, producer

But the difference here is it's a community-owned greengrocers.

Richard Norton, Headingley Development Trust

Absolutely. It's wholly owned by the Development Trust. But the Development Trust has over 1200 members of whom around 400 have invested in community shares through two different share offers.

Geoff Bird, producer

So it's kind of complicated, but the essentially it's community owned business and people around here have a stake in it. It is a very interesting area – it's not particularly impoverished. But it has got this large student population and, given its particularity, I'm just wondering how far this kind of model could spread? Do you think this is something that we need across the country to reclaim the high street?

Richard Norton, Headingley Development Trust

I think it's absolutely a key, you know, key option if you like. It's not gonna work everywhere. We've very much taken the approach from the start. You know, we would do things our way and do it for ourselves if you like. I mean, we're still subject to all those things like, you know, business rates and all the rest of it. I suppose you could say it's a different way of funding, independent retail activity.

Geoff Bird, producer

Can I bring you in as well, Helen. How hard has it been over the last 12 years?

Helen Seymour, Headingley Development Trust

I think sometimes it's lack of opportunities. I mean, it's hard work. That's the other thing. But it's really interesting. And it's a lot of fun. And it's incredibly satisfying. When the farmers market's on, on a Saturday, it's a very good vehicle, if you like, for making things happen. So people get chatting and say, "wouldn't it be great if we did such and such?" And then things happen.

Geoff Bird, producer

Brilliant. Well, the thing that's going to happen now is that I'm going to buy some veg. Thank you very much indeed.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

That was Geoff Bird on the high streets in Headingley.

So Rhian, we were talking about scale earlier. Can that kind of model that we just heard in Geoff' report – can it be up-scaled? Can it be built on significantly?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

I think in terms of what we are seeing is other reasons for shoppers to come back to high streets. So that was a really interesting example. What we're seeing a lot of recently is different space on high streets be used in different ways. So the market hall phenomenon, or food hall phenomenon that we're seeing, definitely in London, but we're also seeing it in other places. So recent examples with the outside of London would be in Altrincham, where they have reused some previously empty space to create a food hall. So it gives shoppers and residents another reason to visit the high street and engage with smaller, often, food businesses.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And this is responding to consumers' expectations again for, you know, an array of choice?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

Absolutely. So I think, our food our cuisines are definitely being influenced by what we see from around the world. But also just people's palates are changing and they increasingly interested in experimenting when it comes to food. And we see that influencing coming through from street food, but we also see it coming through in ranges within large scale retailers, and in places like food halls.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay. And Debbie, I mean, that sort of model as well – these kinds of interventions – can they just help kind of raise the spirit of the high street as well and change the way people feel about it?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Oh, definitely. Because of course, it's the people that actually live there that are taking up these spaces because they're relatively cheap. And it also gives them just a chance to try something. So it's a real low cost entry model. And I think on that broader question of scalability, we do have Co-operatives UK, that binds us together, as co-operatives where they just offer great financial advice, training and education and just how to set up a business. And they really can be the deal breaker between the business being successful, and just really pointing out the pitfalls. So there's a lot of support for people out there, but the really important thing is that the people in that community have enough opportunity to share their skills and experience producing fabulous food products, but craft products, I think, is important as well. And it really disappoints me when people have a challenge around charity shops. I mean they're just ace. And it's the ultimate recycling model.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

When you say challenge around charity shops...

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Some people don't like the fact that the high street has more charity shops perhaps than they did in the past. That's certainly what I pick up from people say, "Oh, it's just full of charity shops." Where, actually now the charity shops are opening on a Sunday, and it's almost a specialist shop. The quality of the retailing has improved dramatically. They are really looking at upscaling the products. So it's a different economy altogether. And I think it's something that we should embrace and forget perhaps some past prejudices.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And you can go in and get all kinds of things – a record, a jumper, an ornament, a book. All under one roof.

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Absolutely, you can enjoy it, enjoy yourself. And actually, the products have got a story which we know is really important to people. So I think they're actually bringing something exciting to the high street.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Value for money as well.

Totally value for money. And I think it's the same with food. I think our relationship with food is perhaps just more about the quality and little and often, and the real experience.

And we've developed a scheme Central England Co-op with FairShare. So our waste food – ours is collected by FairShare – but then we've worked with all of the recipients. So rather than just saying this is what we've got, this is what you can have. We've actually worked with playgroups, we've worked with after school clubs and we've worked with people that are in rehab and understand what products do you actually want? So we separate and they receive it within 24 hours. And what we're trying to do – again food banks are just a reality of life today, unfortunately. So what Fairshare does, and the reason that we're doing a lot of work with them is, it gives dignity to the people that are actually receiving. So you don't go with a letter and you hold up and hope you don't get recognised, while somebody offers you the food that they think you might want. It's actually about the community really working together.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And that thing about narrative as well. People just care more about where their food came from, the story behind it. As you say, where it might go, if, you know, they've got too much or it's going to be wasted. Why do people care about the backstory more now?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

I think from my perspective, is we're all more aware? So I think it's harder to not care, which is a good thing. I think it's really interesting to see in our research, we see spikes in data. And you can absolutely correlate them with things that are happening in the wider world and what's being published in the media. So, for example, when the Blue Planet programme was on, we saw a real surge in interest in trying to reduce plastics. And I think we are probably just as a society more aware of the impact of where your food comes from, how it's produced, and what happens to it. And the remaining parts of it afterwards.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Which you would think would sew in some way back onto the high street because it's more local, isn't it? So you've got more chance of knowing where the food products came from. And perhaps they were locally sourced.

Rhian Thomas, IGD

I think the challenge still for shoppers is understanding the impact they can have. So I think a lot of people think “I can't necessarily influence these things. So what can I do as an individual, on an individual level to make a positive change?” And I think that's where definitely the industry is working at the moment to try and help shoppers see that actually, small changes you can make can have a positive impact, because it feels like for a lot of people such a massive issue. And how can you as one person, do something about that? Well, if we all do something, then we can. And I think that's really positive in the industry as a massive opportunity to take make some incredible strides in that space.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay, so you both been asked to come along with a radical idea – something that will make a difference to the way we shop.

Debbie, as someone who's always shopping, let's start with you. What is your radical idea?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

So we've shared a lot about making the environment itself really welcoming from a customer's perspective, I think that's absolutely crucial. But there's something that's very close to our hearts at Central England Co-op, and it's actually the safety of our colleagues. And each week there is a serious violent incident against a colleague in-store. So something that we're trying to do is to really raise the awareness – and it's just about respect. So each time there is an incident we write to our MPs we write to the Home Secretary, and we would be looking for a change in the law that really gives the same custodial sentence to violence against shop workers that you get from public service workers.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And is this affecting, you know, the number of people who feel safe enough to want to work on the high streets – is that a problem?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

It really is a problem because if you go to work – and we had a particular incident in a store, it was six o'clock in the morning, and it was the cleaner going in. Well, I'm sorry, but working three hours a day, you just do not expect to go into work and have to face a violent threat. And so we really just have to put an end to it. We've worked with another co-op, East of England Co-op on an arc system. So we've got devices that people can wear, that means that they will automatically be tracked. But it really does need a change in the law and a change in our attitude towards shop workers in general. They're brilliant jobs, you can have absolutely amazing careers out of them. And it is a societal thing just about the respect and the decency that we have for people.

So we've gone to the extent where we've taken people that have been violent in our stores, and we've got an offender rehab program where actually we're supporting them throughout their rehabilitation and actually offering them jobs back in the co-op. Now some people think it's high risk. But actually, it is amazing when people are confronted with the consequences of what they have done – often for really not a great deal – it's just bringing the human touch to it and really making them appreciate. So that's something that we that we're doing. And I think it just helps gel the community because often the community does know the people that go into stores and be violent and looking to thief.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Well I was going to say. Does this happen in certain areas more than others, because I guess there are some places where everybody knows the people who work in the shop and there is that familiarity and relationship. And then other places perhaps not so much, but that's maybe something that could be built on.

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

It does vary, but unfortunately in the build up to Christmas, it happens pretty much everywhere. So people that are quite desperate to fix their own personal circumstances, just don't consider the consequences of the impact of their behaviour on others.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And so how does the process take shape? You know, are these people offered rehabilitation? How do you encourage them, I guess, to take part in the programme.

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

So we work directly with the police services. And we explain that we are offering this as an option. But of course, it's still voluntary, if people wish to take it up. And we've been quite surprised at the number of people that are really genuinely looking for a solution to the problem that they find themselves in. So I don't believe that anybody gets up in the morning and thinks, what can I do bad in the world today? Or certainly very, very few, at least. It's just about understanding what was the motive and intent in the first place, and is there anything we can do about it? But as a consequence of the programme, the incidents have reduced in the stores where we have been conducting that activity.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Which is a very gracious attitude to have, but do all consumers feel like that or is there criticism that you are just kind of just putting money back to shoplifters or, you know, giving too much to them or they're not being punished as much?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

So they are rehabilitation programs, so we have to remember they will be sentenced. And that sentence should be fit for the crime. So they should have been dealt with through the usual processes. But our concerns are primarily with our colleagues and their safety. And this is proving that it's having a beneficial effect on them.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And that it's working.

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

It is.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So every week, this is a massive problem – what's causing it?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

Unfortunately, one of the root causes is drug abuse. So people are coming into stores, they're stealing things. So they often take the highest value items. So they'll be looking to steal cigarettes and alcohol, they're then selling them to feed their habit.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And Rhian?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

So I guess from my perspective, we spend a lot of time looking at the trends in the food and grocery market and in my world, particularly what shoppers are doing. And I think my radical idea is that they aren't actually changing the reasons of what they're doing, what is changing is what they expect. So ultimately, most of us go food and grocery shopping, obviously, to buy the items we need. But we do that and we are seeking good value products. We are seeking to use our time efficiently. And we are essentially shopping for what we want. We want what we want when we want it. It's really that simple. And I think my radical idea is that that isn't going to change. I think what is going to change is how I expect to be able to access some of these products. How they will be delivered to me potentially, and even where I will buy them in the future. I think we are seeing a blurring of lines between different channels. At IGD we firmly believe that online is incredibly important but physical stores have a massive role to play.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay. How would you recommend that this idea is implemented?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

Yeah, I guess my idea comes back to really understanding your shopper. So really getting to the nub of why they're doing what they're doing because it's very easy to look at data and to see patterns etc which is really important. But trying to get underneath their motivations as to what they're doing enables, from a retailer's perspective potentially competitive edge, to really understand the shopper and to deliver their needs and understanding them at differing levels. So obviously we see general trends in the market, but being able to apply those in localities etc, as Debbie's talked about, gives opportunities for retailers to do quite differing initiatives from store to store even or obviously regionally as well.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So you're talking about people's experience to people expect to go and just do more than just shop. They want to come away feeling like they've had an experience that was perhaps more than just functional, it was more than just buying what they needed.

Rhian Thomas, IGD

I think that is really varied. So sometimes I just need to be able to get my lunch, my weekly shop and just please make it as easy for me. So make sure that what I need is available on the shelf. Make sure that it's competitively priced, and make sure it's easy for me to get it, essentially. And other times it will be actually I'm looking for inspiration. So I want to try a new meal I want to try different food or have a family with an allergen. Help me cater for their needs. Or it might be actually I'm looking to reduce food waste. So how can I buy pack sizes are products that suit me and my household structure? So it's very different needs and, I guess, the challenge for

retailers and manufacturers is layering over multiple needs from different shoppers. But staying close to those shoppers I believe is always, always advisable.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay, well, how high are the stakes for people who like bricks and mortar shops who probably wants to go to the high streets? How long have we got left? How is it looking in reality?

Rhian Thomas, IGD

We don't predict that there's going to be a significant move away from the physical high street or the physical store when it comes to food and grocery shopping. We see a diversification in stores. So you have larger format stores changing what they offer, you have convenient stores, bringing in additional services. You have more discount focused stores offering a wide array of products. Your specialists entering the market who focus on one particular area or one particular category. But we see that shoppers will definitely be picking and choosing how they use these channels, and will be complementing that with online. I think the important part of online is the roll it plays as a shop window for shopping.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And Debbie, what do you think?

Debbie Robinson, Central England Co-operative

For me, we've just got to make it vibrant and exciting in the greengrocers that would have their wares out on the pavements that just look fantastic. So we sell amazing products that look good, that tastes good, that smell good. And I think we've got an awful lot to do there. I think the high street will just continue to evolve. So at the moment, there's sort of these barbers and wet shave bars popping up all over the place. The tattoo artists are having a real field day. The charity shops are doing really well. Some of them will last, some of them will be replaced by other things. But I think we talk about experiential but there's something about the physical and they are the things actually we need support in doing.

So I'd like to see more health services actually on the high street. Because of course, people that have chronic illness, they have to go frequently. And I think there's a benefit of just bringing all of those physical needs together on the high street, it would help, certainly to bring back some of that wonderful vibrancy. But it'll be around in 100 years' time when someone else is having the conversation.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Good to hear. And the more cocktails in shops, the better. That's an idea I can get behind. Okay, well, that's all for today. A big thank you to my guests, Debbie Robinson and Rhian Thomas.

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More Than a Shop is a collaboration between Co-operatives UK, The Co-op, Co-op News, The Co-operative College and The Co-operative Heritage Trust. The series is presented by me, Elizabeth Alker, and it's produced by Geoff Bird on behalf of Sparklab Productions.