Adapting To A New World

The aim of ART Software Group is to deliver practical connection through technology. Here, RLI speaks with Director Gareth Jordan about the firm's Retail Advantage technology and what it can offer businesses in these unique and ever evolving times.

For ART Software Group, the mission has always been to provide practical connection through the right tools for any given task or role. As digital environments evolve, it has become more important than ever for the company to stay true to their people-centric approach and meet the needs of individual users.

Their PropTech solution Retail Advantage is a prime example with its versatile tools and reporting methods tailored to mixed-use retail and leisure destination management, property groups and tenants. Retail Advantage helps users to reveal potential, enhance growth and develop collaborative paths focused on performance objectives.

"Retail Advantage emerged from a need to adapt to the changes in retail. Property landlords as well as retail and leisure operators were finding it difficult to keep pace with changes in consumer spending and as a result opportunities were being missed," explains Gareth Jordan, Director at ART Software Group. "Destination teams needed faster understanding in order to capitalise and adapt strategies, and this was proving difficult despite the increasing pool of data that they could potentially tap into and draw insight from."

Initially working with pioneers in the outlet industry, Retail Advantage grew to become the solution of choice, and is now used for analytics in at least 90 per cent of the UK's outlet villages and numerous other retail environments. Today, they have deep partnerships that stretch across all retail and leisure landscapes.

The product of experience, Retail Advantage drives performance and informs leasing, marketing and management strategy by bringing accurate data together to provide tailored reporting and strategic analytics. Every aspect of Retail Advantage is designed to be intuitive to get the right information to the right person quickly. One-click board and stakeholder reports and cross-portfolio communications connect everyone across the business, from investors and asset managers to site management teams and store staff. "You cannot force the creation of a community, but if you want it to evolve then you need to lay the foundation for one to thrive. Today, that starts with a digital layer to easily engage and inform brand partners, so communication tools are also an integral part of our app. This helps to develop a connected-community focused on shared knowledge and objectives," says Jordan.

"During highs or lows, a more pragmatic view is proving integral. With our history in solutions that support performance-linked leases, Retail Advantage has been particularly beneficial for those that are testing and implementing new lease structures, where clearly measuring different metrics and their impact on performance may well be the way forward for the industry," explains Jordan.

The team at ART Software Group has always been a strong creative force, seeking to develop new ways to further understand the contributors to performance.

They have made this a key part of their approach to design and purpose.

This can be highlighted in the fact that Retail Advantage is not a static solution where the business simply dictates to its clients how things should work. The platform is a base that is often enhanced by client requests and ART actively encourages this and works closely with them to deliver on precise needs.

"Retail Advantage has evolved fairly dramatically since its inception. There are of course some performance indicators that have not changed, and we haven't discarded things that have always proved effective in favour of an inferior but shinier idea. This shows the maturity and experience of our platform and approach," Jordan comments.

The main objective of the concept is still to create flexible ways to accurately present, explore and most importantly get value from data that leads to the optimal outcomes for a site or portfolio of sites.

Whilst speaking on the topic of trends in the industry for 2021, Jordan feels that innovation is vital for stores to capitalise on the change in behaviour while consumers adapt and shop differently, not just a move to online, but also to shape and better understand what consumers want and need in their shopping environments.

He goes on to explain that when people consider future trends in innovation, they can concentrate too much on looking for something otherworldly. Sometimes there is a revolutionary concept that nobody envisaged before, but more often than not, the most effective innovations genuinely help to make the work that is already being done easier and faster.

"This is the time for practical solutions, like Retail Advantage to shine. Every year it seems, retail is presented with a new set of challenges – changing consumer patterns, fluctuating international visitors, omni-channel etc. as brands experiment, swap and share between in-store and online strategy. So understanding where your trade is coming from and how to maintain those revenue streams become hugely important," Jordan clarifies.

Looking to the future, the goal for ART Software Group is always to add visibility for their clients, and they are excited to be working with new prospects and to help people come out of lockdown in the right direction.

"In the past twelve months we have seen the fragility of what was the status quo across retail and leisure. The impact of several lockdowns has not allowed retail sites to gain much momentum in growth, but the glimmers of recovery are there and results have been achieved against footfall levels that have often been half of what they were before the pandemic," says Jordan.

"We will continue to refine our blend of solutions, add new modules and work on optimal ways to offer value and a true return on investment in data that supports both landlords and retail partners. From improving operations and efficiency to empowering decision-makers with analytics, we are in the middle of a digital and cultural transformation to reboot retail," he concludes.

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