

Interview



Desirée Bollier, chief executive of Value Retail Management, is aiming to 'win hearts, not just wallets'
Picture: Feargal Ward

35

The number of new boutiques in the extension to Kildare Village

€50m

The amount its owners, Value Retail, are spending on it

2.5m

The number of shoppers who visit Kildare Village every year

Kildare Village's €50m expansion embraces growth – and customers

BY GILLIAN NELIS

Desirée Bollier wants to give Kildare Village's customers a hug.

Not in the literal sense — that would be difficult, given that there are 2.5 million of them every year — but in terms of what they experience as they navigate its designer boutiques.

“When it comes to looking after our customers, we can't just be good. We have to be great,” says the chief executive of Value Retail Management.

“Our customer now has infinite choices, and we are fighting for her attention and her time. We need to make her experience of shopping with us seamless and that means giving her things like valet parking, a hands-free shopping service and access to a VIP room.

“We need to hug her, because hugging her allows us to establish a long-term relationship with her.

“It means we win her heart, not just her wallet.”

Bollier is in Kildare to run the rule over the extension to the centre that will open next Thursday. It has cost Value Retail €50 million to build and will include 35 new boutiques that will be occupied by the likes of Armani, Swarovski, Under Armour and Kipling.

Jewellers Folli Follie, the German sock and hosiery store Falke and the American watch and accessories firm Fossil will also have stores there.

A total of 380 new jobs have been created, bringing total employee numbers to over 1,000. Some 120 of them will be in Le Pain Quotidien, which is opening its first Irish café in Kildare Village.

Bollier has been with Value Retail since 2001, having spent the previous 14 years with Ralph Lauren.

Established by the US property developer Scott Malkin, Value Retail operates ten luxury outlet Villages, including the phenomenally successful Bicester Village in England, which attracts 6.3 million visitors a year.

The first Village opened in China last year and there are already plans for another.

And on the same day phase two of Kildare Village opens to the public, so too does a train station at Bicester Village.

It's a far cry from the early days of the business, when Bollier and Malkin had to convince sceptical brands that getting into outlet shopping was a good idea.

“At the time, the term

‘luxury outlet’ was an oxymoron. People didn't associate the concept of outlet shopping with a nice environment, or with good service,” she says.

“We had to assure people that we could elevate the concept, and turn it into something quite unique.

“The brands started to trust us enough to open in one Village, then another, and then another.

“We delivered for them — we've recorded double-digit growth every year.”

Bollier is confident that the business will continue to perform strongly in the Irish market. “We love Ireland, and we love doing business here,” she says.

“There's a nimble mindset here that is really wonderful. We are looking to do very strong numbers here.”