

RETAIL

Value Retail puts hospitality at center of outlet shopping experience

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The Bicester Village Shopping Collection takes its name from the group's "crown jewel." Image credit: Bicester Village

By SARAH JONES

Upscale outlet group Value Retail is rebranding its collection of shopping centers to unify all of its properties around the globe.

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The company has renamed its 11 off-price centers in Europe and China for its popular Bicester Village outlets in the United Kingdom. Now known as the Bicester Village Shopping Collection, the chain is centering itself on a singular retail concept that focuses on rethinking luxury retail through hospitality.

“Since Bicester Village opened 22 years ago, Value Retail has grown and now operates 11 international shopping destinations in Europe and China,” said Desirée Bollier, chair of value retail management and chief merchant of **Value Retail**, London.

“Bicester Village remains the jewel in our crown with its global reputation as the reference point for luxury shopping tourism,” she said. “Last year alone Bicester Village welcomed 6.7 million guests from round the world.

“Because discerning international luxury consumers are so aware of Bicester Village, it made absolute sense to put such a well-known and internationally recognized name center stage of our global branding and unite all our villages under the umbrella of the Bicester Village Shopping Collection.”

Retail rebrand

Value Retail operates outlet centers in London; Milan; Munich, Germany; Dublin, Ireland; Barcelona, Spain; Madrid, Spain; Paris; Brussels; Antwerp, Belgium; Cologne, Germany; Düsseldorf, Germany; Frankfurt, Germany; Suzhou, China and Shanghai.

Together, these properties welcome upwards of 40 million shoppers per year who seek up to 80 percent discounts on merchandise from brands such as Burberry, Dior and Gucci.

While the company specializes in value-driven retail, its focus has always been on hospitality.

“We have never set out to be discount outlets,” Ms. Bollier said. “Instead, hospitality is everything and at the core of

what we do, and great dining is an integral part of being great hosts. If all you're doing is hawking a commodity, Amazon or Alibaba will always do it better as the future of retail distribution is undoubtedly digital.

"However, our focus on hospitality sets us apart. Going right back to our company's roots in Two Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles, our aim always was – and is - to create value through service and memorable, engaging experiences," she said. "We do that by treating our consumers as highly valued guests and we agonize over every detail and its execution, including our dining and restaurants.

"Traditional retail has failed to understand how important it is to put hospitality at its heart and online retail obviously can't deliver an enjoyable physical experience. By delivering a superlative experience, we've become a successful tourist destination and our guests travel halfway round the world to visit us. Today's discerning, international, luxury consumer wants to be wowed by experiences that deliver lasting memories. Tourists go where the physical experiences intersects with brand building – the future of tourism is the experience."



Bicester Village Shopping Collection. Image credit: Bicester Village Shopping Collection

Through its rebranding, the Bicester Village Shopping Collection will have a singular concept of hospitality.

Each village has services such as valet parking, luggage storage and a concierge. Creating a more VIP experience, the properties also have private appointment-only spaces.

While the villages share a name, the centers each reference the local architecture and culture of their locations. For instance, the company's Suzhou property incorporates the Chinese art of Feng shui through a water feature.

Another piece of the puzzle is dining. Bicester Village's Farmshop serves up fresh British fare, while the Fidenza Village in Milan has eateries where shoppers can dine on Italian dishes.

Off-price opportunity

Discounting can often hold negative connotations in luxury, but it does not have to be a negative.

Luxury brands should consider offering discounts or offers on their best products to provide an entry point for consumers to experience them firsthand, according to the co-founder of Dealmoon.

Chinese shopping recommendation site Dealmoon has become the largest distributor for a number of luxury brands in the United States, as it feeds Chinese Americans' demand for high-end goods. While discounting is often looked at negatively, the executive pointed to deals as a prime provocation for shoppers to put a brand's product in their cart for the first time ([see story](#)).

When dealing with off-price subsidiaries, a report from L2 suggests that retailers try to keep the experience between them and the full-price retailer as unified as possible. For example, a combined loyalty program that rewards customers on the same account for shopping full-price and off-price is essential to keeping this parity.

On the brand side, off-price retailers present an excellent opportunity to defend brands from resellers, who have the advantage of being one of the first search results when customers go looking for cheaper luxury goods ([see story](#)).

"Brands are starting to understand that their flagship stores in prime locations should not put unsold merchandise on sale," Ms. Bollier said. "Those stores should be beautiful, permanent showcases of the best of the best to celebrate and boost the brands' image, engage the customer and drive aspiration. This way, surplus stock can be swiftly moved to an appropriate location where they can be off-price without ever cheapening the brand.

"Our villages are those appropriate locations because our partner brands are proud to be associated with them and we help them achieve full-price sales by introducing them to new markets," she said. "Sophisticated international customers often have their first interaction with a brand through the Bicester Village Shopping Collection and then thanks to their spectacular, enjoyable experience with us they are highly likely to go on to become a full-price

customer and forge a loyal relationship with the brands they discover with us.

“From our perspective, we’ve seen how much our brand partners love those opportunities we offer and understand that we protect, enhance and add value to their image, reputation and equity. “

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