Flight to quality

The formidable Mary Portas has returned to our TV screens for her new series Mary Portas: Secret Shopper in which she goes undercover in big chain stores and films their 'hopeless' customer service, and then tries to do something about it.

While Portas, alias Mary Queen of Shops, puts the spot light on the customer service shoppers receive from retailers, I will be doing my own undercover work as a judge in the British Council of Shopping Centre's Achieving Customer Excellence Awards. My focus – as will that of my colleagues – will be on the customer service experience that shoppers get from shopping centres' staff.

Some might argue that there's little point because it's retailers that make a shopping centre and not shopping centre managers and their service partners – but those of us on the judging panel of the ACE Awards disagree strongly.

The shopping environment is made up of three distinct realms – retailer, shopping centre and public – and it's vital that each is top-notch and ready to compete with the virtual realm of online shopping.

The ACE judges are currently travelling up and down the country visiting the centres short-listed in the awards – which this year received a record number of entries – to determine which are achieving excellence in facilities and service experience.

Speaking personally, I'll be looking to meet someone or see something that 'lifts my spirits'. Someone who 'makes my day'.

For example, I have in mind the men's toilet attendant at Liverpool One, commended in the awards a few years ago. He was an amazing ambassador – a one-man tourist board, welcoming committee and your new best friend – all rolled into one!

No doubt we will all be glued to our boxes (9pm Wednesdays, Channel 4) as the straight-talking Portas attacks the retailers, but centre managers, don't rest on your laurels – it could be you next in Mary's sights!

Howard Morgan
Managing director
RealService