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1,000 'smart' sensors to monitor high street footfall across the UK

The Local Data Company (LDC), in partnership with University College London (UCL) and the Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC) are to deploy 1,000 'SmartStreetSensors' as part of the UK's largest study into high street footfall patterns and impacts.

It is no secret that our High Streets are changing and the way consumers choose to shop has witnessed a drastic revolution in recent years. LDC data show that in 2015 multiple retail and leisure occupiers closed a total of 1,043 High Street stores. In contrast, 593 independent retailers opened in High Street locations. What does this mean? Is footfall really in decline or is it simply that the customer journey has changed? How is 'pitch' evolving across these towns and cities? Do high street coffee shop brands really increase footfall? How do vacant units impact footfall? Which high street types are suffering the most, or the least? The SmartStreetSensor project will provide valuable insight to enable these questions to be answered.

What is the SmartStreetSensor Project?

The Economic and Social Research Council-funded **SmartStreetSensor** Project is to be the most comprehensive study of footfall patterns across Great Britain to date. Some 1,000 sensors will measure live footfall in 81 towns and cities across the UK. The locations have been chosen in order to offer a wide geographical spread, differing demographic profiles and a range of town centre profiles (based on health and occupancy).

LDC has spent 18 months developing and testing its SmartStreetSensor which has been developed and built in the UK. LDC has partnered with UCL and the CDRC to provide the technology and a dashboard for the analysis and interpretation of the live feed of footfall data. This specific project is focussed on High Streets and not Shopping Centres and Retail Parks, however, this is planned to follow in future studies.

This project will leverage the brains and experience of the UK's leading academics in this field and will provide the first independent, unique and comprehensive research into footfall patterns and their significance.

> **How will it work?** The **SmartStreetSensor** devices will use a unique calibration methodology to ensure the most accurate feed of data. This process ensures that the devices only register people walking past a specific shop and thus reflect the opportunities shopowners have to influence their immediate high street. The data is then sent anonymously, analysed and stored in LDC's data warehouse before being presented through LDC's highly visual live dashboards. Measures from all of the stores within a given centre will then be made available for reseach use, and will be made available through the popular maps.cdrc.ac.uk website.

Why is this being done?

The **SmartStreetSensor** project team want to leverage LDC's detailed knowledge of High Streets, past and present, and combine this with these unique footfall insights, as ultimately these factors determine the life or death of these places.

The project will leverage the combined expertise of the highly experienced technology teams at LDC and UCL. They will analyse the data and organise them in ways that will allow occupiers, local authorities, transport operators, landlords and investors to make more informed decisions.

This project is part of the much broader agenda of ESRC's Consumer Data Research Centre to better understand places, people and the businesses that can bring economic vitality to both. LDC's mission is a strategic part of this and enables decisions that are evidence based and not over-reliant upon 'gut-feel'.

SmartStreetSensor partners include Patisserie Valerie, Jack Wills, Tortilla, The Entertainer, Pizza Hut, Eurochange, Superdrug, Thorntons, Dixons Carphone, Itsu, Ed's Easy Diner, Pret a Manger, Aldi, inmidtown BID and Oxfam.

Professor Paul Longley, Director of the ESRC Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC) at UCL commented:

"We think this project is an excellent example of how the worlds of academia and business can work together in the Big Data era. The same data that can tell a retailer how footfall translates into sales at the till can also contribute to a far better understanding of how people move around Britain's towns and cities. This wider understanding is crucial to better assessments of the health of retail centres, as well as the still broader implications of transport and other planning policies."

Matthew Hopkinson, director at **LDC** commented:

"LDC is delighted to be part of this exciting and innovative project with UCL and the CDRC. It plays to all of LDC's strengths from its army of field researchers, to its in depth knowledge of retail places that it has been tracking since 2008, to its team of technologists who enable the data capture, analysis and delivery of millions of rows of data updated daily. In addition it builds on the strong relationships that LDC has developed with the country's leading universities.

"Footfall is the lifeblood of any location as without people you have no need for shops and without shops you have no community so understanding where, when and what type of footfall you have is critical to any stakeholder in retail and leisure places. The current generic footfall numbers do not provide the breadth or depth of coverage that retailers need to understand the performance of their shops. Pavement opportunity is what this data will show and that is what retailers and leisure operators can influence and therefore relate back to store sales. This data combined with rigorous academic analysis and LDC's detailed knowledge of places and companies will enable landlords and occupiers to access previously unavailable business-critical insights."

ENDS
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Notes for editors
A map of the project towns can be seen at
http://www.localdatacompany.com/smartstreetsensor-project

ABOUT

The Local Data Company is the UK's leading data creator using real people on the street to acquire the most up to date, on demand location and company specific data for the retail and leisure sectors. LDC combines powerful proprietary technology with a unique, field researched database of over half a million premises., LDC delivers primary evidence on thousands of companies and locations, including high streets, town centres, shopping centres, retail parks and standalone out of town stores. LDC brings data alive and delivers clarity through its integration, aggregation and highly visual delivery along with unique modelling and analysis carried out in partnership with the UK's leading universities.

The Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC) is working with consumer-related organisations to open up data resources to trusted researchers. The CDRC was established by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to contribute towards ensuring the future sustainability of UK research using consumer data. The CDRC is bringing together world-class researchers from the University of Leeds, University College London, University of Liverpool and the University of Oxford to offer a range of expert services to a wide range of users.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's largest funder of research on the social and economic questions facing us today. It supports the development and training of the UK's future social scientists and also funds major studies that provide the infrastructure for research. ESRC-funded research informs policymakers and practitioners and helps make businesses, voluntary bodies and other organisations more effective. The ESRC also works collaboratively with six other UK research councils and Innovate UK to fund cross-disciplinary research and innovation addressing major societal challenges. The ESRC is an independent organisation, established by Royal Charter in 1965, and funded mainly by the Government.

Matthew Hopkinson is available for interview. Please contact Julia Simion (020 3111 4392/ julia@localdatacompany.com) to arrange a date and time.

Paul Longley is available for interview. Please contact Navta Vij (020 3108 1098 / n.vij@ucl.ac.uk)

For further information: www.localdatacompany.com