



PetrolPlaza Talks: Service station of the future

We talk to Martine Thijs, Global Strategic Accounts at ICASA Group, about the customer journey, the role of data and tools of engagement as we move towards the service station of the future.

The era of petrol stations as vehicle-centric locations that supply liquid fuels is coming to an end. In the new era of 'retail hubs', the customer is at the centre of operations – a customer that is willing to exchange information for a better, more complete service.

With stations adding more and more services, including mobility tools such as bike-sharing, carpooling and automated vehicles, a key aspect will be geography. Stations located in cities, highways and rural areas will adopt different services.

"Another key aspect is the customer's generation – how people see what a car represents is different. The younger generations are looking at what is convenient. They don't mind paying more for more sustainable solutions," explains Martine Thijs, Global Strategic Accounts at ICASA Group, a software provider for the retail energy sector.

Gathering data about the customer should be the main block when building a strategy for the future. Understanding when and how is important to improve and optimize a retailer's operation.

Smart City - Smart Station

Thijs uses the concept of *Smart Cities* to illustrate how data and technology will change customer behaviour.

"Cities have a lot of systems, sensors and cameras that provide information. As a customer, if I want to know the best way to a parking lot, these systems will help. Even more so with autonomous vehicles."

This disruption represents both a threat and an opportunity for service stations. The impact will not be as severe on highway stations. For unmanned stations that solely depend on tradition liquid fuel, the threat is important.

"Stations in the centre of cities should look at becoming real retail hubs. Retailers need to be part of the innovations that are happening in cities."

Two things are clear for Thijs when thinking about a retailer's strategy: convenience, in all its aspects, is essential, and all energies need to be offered.