Introduction

When I had the idea of writing this book I felt that I had the experience necessary to take a view of shopping from a real estate professional's standpoint. As a qualified valuer and surveyor, and with more than thirty years' experience of developing, promoting and managing shopping centres and individual shops in Britain and several Continental European Countries, as well as long experience of shopping centres in the United States of America, I would be able to draw on a great deal of knowledge. My experience and technical knowledge of computers, software, and specifically the new rapid advances in technology including the Internet, was restricted to my personal use of my computer. Much more was needed. As a result, I asked my son, Steven Markham, if he would assist me. Steven has spent his entire adult education and working life in gaining an invaluable knowledge of software and computers. In addition, he formed a specialist software retail company which operated several central London branches and has also been the Retail Director of a young, expanding and very successful fashion group. He has been able to offer a unique contribution to the technical research with the benefit of a retail perspective. As such, much of the opinion which I have obtained is based on a broader base than my own experience and assumptions. It is, I hope, more valuable because it takes account not only of my own developer's optimism – a factor which has had to be carefully recognised in gaining an objective view – but Steven's more biased leaning toward technology being the answer to the future. The fact that such a cautious conclusion of opinion of the effects of technology on the established retail habit has been reached serves as a more balanced stance than any opinion I may have reached without his research. It also becomes an even judgement without the interests of commercial gain, as often exposed in claims by online shopping promoters.

The opinions given in this book are clearly my own, but Steven's invaluable contribution by providing me with so much research data which has influenced those opinions, is acknowledged with love and thanks for his tireless efforts.