

Getting mobile is the future of technology

SOPHIE FOSTER

SHOPPING malls that are more like entertainment centres, mobile phones that replace wallets and shop assistants who pick up where you left off during online browsing: Vita Group founder and chief executive Maxine Horne has seen the future, and it's already upon us.

One of Queensland's most successful business people, Ms Horne (pictured) said the technological revolution had changed lives, though a lot of developments were still to come.

"There'll be a lot of confusion around what technology can and can't do, which is where service comes in," she said of the Vita Group's portfolio of technology service stores.

"It's about how do we embrace this to make the customer experience seamless. I really see that coming. From a telecom perspective, it's really about taking mobile and integrating it to your lives.

"There's a lot of talk about the mobile wallet. In years to come people won't need keys to get into cars or houses. There are a lot of things coming meant to make our lives easier."

Businesses that were able to maintain high service levels and customer focus in such environments, she said, would be the ones who stuck around to see what comes next.

"I work in the industry and I think, 'oh my gosh'. So what about people that don't come into contact with technological change daily?" she said.

Ms Horne, one of 16 Northern Region nominees

for the 2014 EY Australian Entrepreneur of the Year award, said her business' biggest success was linked to two iconic brands – rolling out a network of Telstra service stores, and a separate thriving Apple service business.

"We started in the heyday. When mobile phones first came into being as a consumer product, there was a real pull to just give away everything to get market share. We were adamant about taking the high ground and focus on providing service.

"We have customers that have had 25 phones from us over the (20) years so that's a testimony to that strategy – and it's even more important than ever now because technology is evolving so quickly."

The "Do it for me" strategy was what would continue to drive growth in the business, she said.

"Over the last 20 years we've gone through cycles of great and not-so-great, and each time we've pulled in our belt to a certain degree but always stayed true to our core which is customer service. In fact we've really over-emphasised it, as opposed to just selling on price."

EY's Brisbane managing partner, Jenny Parker said that 14 years since the first Entrepreneur awards, "we are still seeing such amazing nominees coming through".

