

Interview: Joel Bruneau Head of Property Development, Omnicane, Mauritius



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â?•The Mon TrÃ©sor Smart City will cater to the business needs of the global healthcare and life sciences sector as no other smart city can.â?• The Head of Property Development of Omnicane Mauritius explains why while explaining the significance of the project for the sustainable development of the Mauritian economy.

There are seven other smart city projects alongside Mon Trésor on Mauritius. What advantages does Mon Trésor have to offer for the global healthcare and life sciences industry over the other seven smart city projects?

Every smart city is focusing on one major characteristic, which is unique to each. We are focusing on combining quality for business with quality of life. For businesses in the healthcare and life sciences industry, Mon Trésor will be the natural choice in Mauritius, as we cater their business needs as no other smart city does!

Proximity to the airport is one of our main advantages, as this is the Mauritian connection to the world. The current economic development in Africa will further benefit the location advantage of Mon Trésor, as we will be the obvious hub for all airport related activities, logistics for example, into the African continent.

The 60 hectares of business facilities will also accommodate easy access to the passenger terminals of the airport. We provided the government with land which they will use to surround the Mon Trésor smart city with an equally smart public infrastructure to ease traffic to- and from the airport.

There will be a Freeport zone within 300 meters (328 yards) of the airport where activities, that fall under the Freeport activity act, will not be taxed; neither VAT nor corporate tax and import duties. This, for example, allows pharmaceutical companies to set up their logistical hub to access Africa, Europe and Asia in a cost-effective and value-adding framework.

Another major strength of Mon Trésor is the combination of these business facilities with state-of-art living and leisure facilities. The residential area will cater all possible human needs, with schooling facilities for children, community gardens, cycle paths and residence facilities held to European standard. Expatriates as well as local workforce will be attracted to the Mon Trésor smart city.

We have established close relations with the European Investment Bank which provided us with the necessary funds to employ Royal Haskoning DHV from the Netherlands, a global renowned urban planner, to ensure that Mon Trésor is held to global standards and becomes a world-wide reference.

The smart aspect of Mon Trésor, is to combine the three aspects 'live, work and play' on the highest level of quality in an environmentally sustainable way.

Since its foundation in the 1850s Omnicane has become a major player in the sugarcane industry. What was the rationale behind the diversification into property development?

The overall idea was to benefit Mauritius through the capitalization of key land assets held by Omnicane.

The southern part of the island was front lining the transformation from a sugar-based industry into a cane cluster with all the challenges such a situation required.

This shift/evolution into a sustainable agro-industrial cane-based cluster was based on a vision and values which have been carried forward and percolated the essence of Mon Tresor in its specific features since inception.

In full conjunction with government authorities, the Mon Trésor project will integrate local communities and bring job opportunities and growth back to the southern region.

The Mauritian government does not have the resources a 1st world nation has and thus is heavily relying on the participation of the private sector, to develop our country. Mon TrÃ©sor will sustainably develop the Mauritian infrastructure which is, in terms of ocean- and air-accessibility especially, vital for the economic development of an island nation.

Simply put, the rationale behind the establishment of Mon TrÃ©sor is that it is critical for the future development of the Mauritian economy.

What are the current implementation challenges and how do you address them?

From the start of the urban planning exercise, we brought on board all the relevant authorities and government bodies so that all the possible constraints are identified at the outset, therefore streamlining the final permits/authorisations process.

The real challenge is to create global recognition of Mauritius, so that the global healthcare and life sciences sector recognizes Mauritius as location for their operations and platform for expansion into Africa; Mon TrÃ©sor smart city will be fundamental in this recognition process as it broadens the opportunities Mauritius offers.

A current challenge in this recognition process is the insufficient connectivity to Africa. Whilst flight times to the African business hubs are short, the frequency has to improve. If daily flights to African business hubs are offered, Mauritius will become the obvious stepping stone into the African market.

Another challenge is our ambition to be certified as a BREEAM community (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology). The certification is internationally renowned and is regulated through strict assessment of multiple different factors. The project is already monitored by BREEAM, which ensures best practices across all implementation stages so we reach our final goal: a sustainable green community, catering all needs, electricity and water supply autonomic while economical viable for all our stakeholders.

What would be considered a success of the project?

Besides becoming a global reference for smart living and state-of-art urban planning, smiling people will be how we measure our success. People have been the centre for all of our plans; and the overall goal is to provide exceptional quality of life for people and their businesses.

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