



FUN^{AND} FOOD

WILL DRIVE THE RETAIL EXPERIENCE OF TOMORROW!

Malls are social spaces they will never die or will be out of business but the tenant mix of malls will change drastically. 'Experiential Retail' will dominate tomorrow's malls.

BY ANSHUMAN BHARGAVA

With the rapid growth of e-commerce, the mall needs to redefine shopping more than ever. The shopper is pressed for time and has endless options on the web. So shopping out is no more an essential activity. Hence, developers have realised that malls cannot be just about shopping. They need to give people emotions and feelings they cannot get on the internet. The focus is on Experience. The new design tagline for malls is 'experience based shopping'.

The concept of malls is that they are a diversion from a person's day to day activity and chores. They are places to socialise and meet and linger. So developers' reason, lets give them more creative ways to socialize and meet and linger and distract themselves from their normal mundane lives. Lets give them the experience through two universally omnipresent human needs: need for food and the need for pleasure.

FOOD

The way to a customer's heart is through his stomach. Eating is a fundamental social activity. There's no fun in eating alone. And eating is a basic human need. Everybody has to eat.

So if mall developers entice people to eat more, they get more people coming into the mall. It's a proven fact that people who come to eat, tend to stay longer and generally shop a bit more than people who don't. The more options a mall provides a customer to eat in a nice environment, the more people will come and bring more friends to eat together.

Food courts provide the variety of food that developers want to offer. Conversion rates in food courts are always high since they generate multiple sales simultaneously.

Design plays a very essential role in this. The location and layout of a food court is extremely essential. In Asia and Europe, food courts are generally in the basement or the upper floors. A shopper has to travel through other shopping to reach the food court – hence promoting impulse buying. Also the location should be such that the food court provides a full panoramic view of other shops in the mall. The food court needs to be well lit – preferably with views to the outside.

Design studies point out that there should be a range of seating in the food court to provide variety. Of late, malls are increasing their offerings of food choices. There is a marked tendency to provide more healthier food options. The shopper travels more and wants to be more physically fit. So give him more world cuisine and healthier food. So we see many malls having farmers' markets and selling world food.

Gourmet market in Siam Paragon, Bangkok is one classic example. Its located on the prime ground floor and serves and sells exotic foods from competing brands from all over the world. Food courts now days incorporate cooking classes. They also showcase the cooking – there is nothing more interesting than seeing a master chef instruct you on how to cook a food you like. Hand crafted food. There are tasting experts – who tell you how to eat food.

It is no coincidence that the most profitable malls in the world have the largest food courts. Ala Moana Shopping Centre in Honolulu is one of the most successful malls of the world. It also has the largest food court in the world as well.

To add diversity, large food courts are also offering equally large number of fine dining and quick service counters outside of the food court at different places across the building.

The cuisine and choice of food retailer is also becoming crucial. The tenant has to match the theme of the mall. Since recent studies show that upscale malls are performing better,

choice of brands for restaurants has to match mall positioning. Case in point – renovation of Westfield Montgomery mall in Maryland.

To attract more people into their restaurants, retailers are adding more tricks to their bag. Sense of smell is a major pull. Cinnabon is a typical example. Free samples (Baskin Robins), Coupons, Combo meals are other strategies to lure hungry shoppers.

Coming home, Indians are also more amenable to experimenting with various cuisines and are developing global palates. In keeping with global trends, eating out has increased in India to as much as eating out 1-2 times per week.

So till the time we cannot eat dinner online, food will be a major attractor in mall design. Food has become the latest discovery, the new mall frontier. Along with Fun

FUN

Entertainment has become such an important concept that the biggest malls in the world – Mall of Dubai, the upcoming mall in Miami Dade, Mall of Oman – are allocating approximately 80 per cent of their floor space for entertainment and amusement.

Smaaash Mall in Bangalore, being developed by Virginia Developers, will have sports simulators for cricket, basketball, football etc. along with world-class rides and amusement attractions. Their brand ambassador – Sachin Tendulkar.

Fun and food have a direct relationship. The more entertained you are, the more you tend to eat. It's a cyclic symbiotic relationship.

Besides the standard theatres and ski slopes, you have indoor roller coasters, aquariums, submarines, drop towers, immersion rides, flying theatres, adventure golf, flight simulators and comedy houses, wave pools and kart racing. There is even a wedding chapel in the Mall Of America. More than 8000 couples have wed there since its opening.

In The West Edmonton Mall in Alberta Canada, we have the biggest indoor wave pool in the world. In the Cevahir Mall in Istanbul, Turkey – we have the second largest clock in the world.

There is a Hungry Games theme park with the Mall Of Qatar. Doha Festival City has an Angry Birds theme park. There is a Lego Land in Dubai Mall while the Mall of America has a Nickelodeon theme to its entertainment zone. The Mall of Qatar will have international acts performing daily on its rotating stage lift – Oasis. Its also tied up with Cirque Soleil as one of its main attractions.

Its not just about fun. There are edutainment zones like Juniverse and interactive digital theme parks such as Vituocity.

Developers have hired the best consultants in entertainment design – Mack Rides, Gerstluer Amusement Rides, Dynamic Attractions, Zierer Rides, ETF Ride Systems, Triotech, Whitewater Attractions, Zamperla, Holovis, Simworx, S&S and Concept 1900.



NOT ALL CHANGE AND DIFFERENTIATION IS GOOD FOR INCREASING REVENUE . ONLY OFFERINGS THAT LEAD TO MAKING A SHOPPING EXPERIENCE PLEASURABLE ARE EFFECTIVE IN INCREASING MALL REVENUE.



Besides games and rides, malls also incorporate galleries, ramp shows, red carpet nights, award nights and cultural nights. Tokyo Midtown has a design gallery and workshop created by Issay Miyake and world-famous architect Tadao Andao.

To make it easier to buy tickets for these rides, games and experiences – developers and retailers, have gone the extra mile to integrate technology. So you have virtual reality kiosks and trial rooms, vr walkthrough terminals. Kiosks make payment easier by scanning the QR codes on the smartphones. There are beacons that constantly update shoppers on nearby offers and events as they travel within a mall. Theatres are increasing becoming upscale with larger and more number of screens. If you plan to stay for a day or two, you could check into a themed hotel also.

A quintessential store is the Disney store – where you have light, music, video streaming walls, specific areas for colouring and viewing and employees play with guests.

COURTING GENERATION Y

One thing that retailers and developers realize is that they need to attract Generation Y or Millineals as they are called – adults in the age group of 18-35 – more so than ever. They need to catch the customer young.

Studies show that Generation Y spends 45 per cent of online time on retail and social websites. They do a lot of buying on the net but they prefer to socialise in person by eating out. So developers incorporate more grocery and entertainment and dining options to attract them – creating variety in eating out amusement. FEC zones attract a younger crowd and younger crowds like food.

GOOD DESIGN

But a word of caution – all the above needs to be tempered with good design and effectiveness in conversion to sales.

New innovations need the basics of good layout, lighting and interiors. People like using well designed, well lit, focused spaces – regardless of time and age.

Not all change and differentiation is good. Only offerings that lead to making a shopping experience pleasurable are effective in increasing mall revenue.

Effective offerings can increase a mall's revenues by as much as 40 per cent.

The challenge is to provide enough offerings to a customer for a full day's experience. Integrating everything from approaching a mall to leaving it conveniently is the key. Change is the only constant. But effectively changing is even more essential for mall developers since there is a marked decrease in consumption of clothes, shoes, home goods. So you have to be cautious with every paisa spent. ●●●

For malls, the new theme is : Creativity!

About the author:

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