

# STORE DESIGN: High Street v/s Malls



INDIAN RETAIL INDUSTRY IS BECOMING MORE ORGANISED AND BRANDS ARE CURRENTLY EXPERIMENTING WITH VARIOUS RETAIL FORMATS ON HIGH STREETS AND MALLS, BUT BOTH HAVE THEIR OWN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES THAT DESIGNERS HAVE TO KEEP IN MIND WHILE DESIGNING STORES

By: Anshuman Bhargava

→ For years in the world of retail, there has been a quiet tug of war between the high street and the malls to win customers. It has truly been a roller-coaster ride. Some say the high street is dead, while others believe the malls are comatose. At some places, brands are shifting shops from high street to malls while in other, prominent retailers purposefully avoid the mall culture to stand out from

the crowd. Some cities show a rise in mall rentals over high street locations, while elsewhere, the reverse becomes true. So how does this affect store design? Does store design indeed vary on a high street compared to a mall in the current context?

#### THE BATTLEFIELD: WHAT AFFECTS RETAIL

These days, customers are time-poor but experience-rich. Inflation,

unemployment and fuel costs are all rising, so consumers are planning their shopping trips accordingly to save on time and money. Going to a store and personally buying products or searching on the Internet and shopping online are different methods through which customers are purchasing what they want. Online shopping saves both time and fuel. Products can be home-delivered

or picked up by the customers themselves from stores. Shopping by credit cards or discount coupons has also become common.

In the current scenario, customers want to buy more but spend less. Since retailers are making less money, they have less money to pay to the property developer. Developers on the other hand cannot complete their projects as they have low cash flow and are not able to repay their debts. As a result, banks have stopped lending them more money. It is a vicious circle.

All of these factors are definitely having their impact on the retail industry. In essence, retailers cannot afford to have unprofitable stores. So a new model of shopping is developing – have a few but bigger stores in better locations (high street) or have a number of smaller stores for brand-reach and better delivery (malls). A strong Internet strategy can always compliment this. Many brands around the world now believe in this strategy, considering that lesser stores translate into low costs, smaller staff, less rents and overheads, etc.

### HIGH STREET AND MALLS: THE PROS AND CONS

Malls and high streets have their own advantages and drawbacks. Most of the malls, at least in India, are build like inward-looking boxes. Having facilities such as an air-conditioned environment, ample parking space for customers, sprawling food courts, a number of theatres for entertainment, and different retail brands clustered under one roof, the main advantages that malls offer are unmatched variety and convenience that few high streets can offer. Indeed, malls are now considered by many customers, especially youngsters, as great places to do comparison shopping.

High streets, on the other hand, suit speciality retailing. Customers can park their cars right in front of the stores, enter a particular shop, do their purchasing and leave. Since high street stores generally tend to be bigger than their mall counterparts, they usually offer collections that one would not find in smaller formats. They also have much higher visibility

in the eyes of the customers since a lot of them have more height and floor space.

In most instances, the high-street stores cost almost half of a similar-sized shop in a mall. High streets control their own timings, maintenance and housekeeping. They are not dependent on the decisions of the mall management for their footfalls or retail mix. So high streets are more suitable for established retailers which have the power to draw customers in by virtue of their brand and name in the market. Malls on the other hand favour the younger, lesser-known brands. Having said that, a lot of retail success is still dependent on three evergreen factors – location, location, and location.



**HIGH STREETS ARE MORE SUITABLE FOR ESTABLISHED RETAILERS WHICH HAVE THE BRAND POWER TO DRAW CUSTOMERS INTO THEIR STORES. MALLS, ON THE OTHER HAND, FAVOUR THE YOUNGER, LESSER KNOWN BRANDS**

### ELEMENT ONE: STORE-FRONTS AND STORE WINDOWS

One crucial design area where a high street outlet differs from a mall store is the store-front and store window. Unlike a mall store, a high-street store-front is hugely dependent on the surrounding streets, the adjacent traffic, the store height and, most importantly, the weather. A mall store-front, on the other hand, is usually governed by mall guidelines and the

atrium look. Window heights are more or less standard from one shop to the next. The materials need not be weather proof. The shop-front of a mall store can be open or closed, while a high-street shop front has to be necessarily closed – especially in an Indian context – because of the heat, dust and rain.

The outer materials of a high-street shop need to be weather resistant. The shop-fronts are usually bigger, differentiated and highly individualised. For example, brands like Apple, Zara and Topman do not rely on traditional advertising by newspaper or media. They have stores in prominent locations with huge storefronts and show windows that act like a beacon in the area, spreading the brand's message.

A high-street store should be visible enough from a distance since the customers are usually far from the store and at times even in a car or a bus. So it should be able to catch the customer's attention immediately. Everything must stand out more and be bolder – the branding, the signage, the facade, etc. In a mall, on the other hand, the show window is smaller and the store-front can be a bit more subdued.

High street store-fronts need to be designed for both the day and the night, but this is not a necessity for a mall store. Its planning is dependent on the location within the mall. The lighting within the high-street store and its external signage should be adjustable according to the time of day. Depending on the store-front size and location, the show window and window display are designed. For example, due to the effect of natural light, mannequins in high street

Air-conditioning needs to be controlled in the high-street store. Storage can be above the main selling area due to more store height. Many times, storage is at the back of the store too. Some shops even provide for small washrooms. Service too governs store layouts. Is the store serviced from the front or the back?

Another trend in high-street stores is that they should be much more than simple selling spaces. Why not incorporate social and entertainment

there because they know what they want. These outlets have a lesser element of impulse shopping. This governs both store layout and store merchandise placement to a huge extent at a high-street store.

Malls, by their very nature, are designed to promote impulse buying among visitors. Anchors are placed strategically to allow customers to see the full merchandise on display along the way. Circulation circuits are designed to provide maximum visibility to the stores. Who knows what else would customers want to buy on their way to the anchor store, food court, or the cinemas?

High street stores do not have such liberty or placement. But since customers come to the market knowing what they want to buy, conversion rates are much higher. But mall stores, because of their footfalls, have more walk-ins and sales.

#### CONCLUSION

High street and malls are evolving in their roles, scope, and context. A few developments are trying to blur the line between the two formats. There are hybrid malls which are trying to use the best elements of each. We have indoor-facing regional malls that have open air restaurants and outdoor-facing huge lifestyle stores with large shop-fronts and floor spaces. So in a way, the mall has begun to meet the high street. The idea is to instill a sense of community within the shopping mall and give the convenience of the facilities of the latter to the high street.

Retail is more than a place to just buy and sell. It can be a place where people meet and know each other. We need not sacrifice community for convenience. At the same time, we should develop convenience that enhances community creation in the first place. ☒



windows need to have less reflection. Nonetheless, window displays need visibility, uniformity, simplicity, originality, cleanness and variety.

#### ELEMENT TWO: STORE LAYOUTS

Store layouts in both high street and mall formats differ on a number of factors. Most mall stores do not have washrooms within their area. They rely on common public facilities. Storage is also at a premium in a mall and they usually do not have adequate height for a mezzanine or roof storage. The store owner wants to utilise the maximum store area for selling. In the high-street stores, sun, rain, wind, and traffic pollution, all govern the merchandise placed next to the entrance and the materials used within the store. Generally such stores allow for a more open and spacious layout than mall stores.



**UNLIKE A STORE IN A MALL, A HIGH STREET STORE-FRONT IS HUGEY DEPENDENT ON FACTORS LIKE THE SURROUNDING STREETS, THE ADJACENT TRAFFIC, THE STORE HEIGHT AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE WEATHER**

activities into the store experience? There can be stores within stores selling a different merchandise. A small coffee shop makes sense within a book store. Why just be a big high-street shop when you can be so much more for your customers?

#### ELEMENT THREE: STORE MERCHANDISE

High-street stores are turning into more specialised units. People go

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anshuman Bhargava is the Director and Creative Head with Blue Leaves Design, an interiors design firm.