

Malls think outside the box to win over shoppers

By  Paul Gerard

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Time. There is never enough of it. It is an increasingly valuable commodity for all South Africans across the entire social and economic spectrum. With less time available to get everything they need to be done, people are demanding more - more choices, services and experiences - from their shopping trips.



What's more, research shows that an increasing number of people are planning their shopping outings more carefully in advance. They are not only considering what they want to get out of their shopping trip, but what their travelling will cost them. Multi-destination shopping costs more. Time- and value-conscious consumers are motivated by shopping experiences that are personal to their needs.

More than ever before, shopping malls are under pressure to offer shoppers even more in a single visit.

However, even those shopping centres that already have a big and varied retail mix cannot offer shoppers everything they want. It is impossible. That's because some retail businesses are simply not a good match for malls. Also, some malls just don't have the surrounding space to grow and extend.

Thinking out of the box

So, how do you give people more on a single shopping trip? More variety necessitates thinking out of the box - literally.

Shopping malls are generally at the core of any node and have been long recognised as the catalysts for surrounding development and new businesses. These businesses absorb some of the energy from the shopping centre. And, if a mall is fortunate, gain this energy in return.

These businesses could include secondary and value retail, medical centres and hospitals, offices, hotels and leisure, motor dealerships, drive-thrus and petrol stations.

By moving away from the typical introverted approach that many shopping centres have taken to date, and taking the wider view, shopping centres have the potential to benefit even more from the businesses around them and, in turn, pass this back again to their neighbours.

The synergy between the different properties and a central mall enables the complementary businesses to feed off the energy from the people visiting the mall, and the mall benefits from the people that want to achieve multiple outcomes from a single trip.

The multi-use options also enable more family members to fulfil their needs in a single trip, which makes the trip cost and time efficient.

Allowing for effortless, hassle-free fulfilment

Precinct planning is critical to ensure smooth flows of traffic between different properties, as well as allowing customers to park in one location and walk between the different options. In this way, it makes it easy for customers to switch between the different uses for effortless, hassle-free fulfilment of more of people's needs in one place.

For mall owners, this means investing beyond their fences. This could be in the form of investing directly into new, complementary developments, or investing in relationships with neighbouring property and business owners, city improvement districts and local government. In this way they are better able to get the best not only from their malls but also from their surrounding precincts.

Bolstering the nodes in which they are located increases the scope and the strength of shopping centres. It also creates well-planned, well-managed retail and community districts.

Each shopping centre and its surrounds form an ecosystem. By adding more retail space that responds to customer demands and reinforcing this with other compelling reasons to visit, we plan to create flourishing, bustling nodes with our shopping centres at their heart in the year ahead. Improving what is around shopping centres improves the shopping centres themselves.

ABOUT PAUL GERARD

Paul Gerard is the managing director and has been involved in Flanagan & Gerard since 2004. As such, he has developed a wealth of experience under the mentorship of both Pat Flanagan and his father Peter Gerard.

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