



# DESIGNING A SUCCESSFUL RETAIL CENTRE FOR TODAY!

While designing any social infrastructure, basic human need is to be served foremost. In designing a shopping centre, the ultimate goal is to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to consumers.

BY ZUBIN COOPER

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This involves a careful planning of the centre to provide an effective flow of customers that gives greatest exposure to shop fronts, where merchandise is attractively displayed to encourage sales hence when it comes to planning and design of shopping malls, the first basic principle is to remember that despite the change in trends over various generations, the reasons people shop remains the same, and the principles of good planning must always be adhered to. Over the past 50 years, particularly in the west, we have seen the evolution of the retail centre from the shops on the street, to strip centres to enclosed centres to multi-level super malls.

But despite all of these variations, there are a few constants that will never change, and which contribute to a successful mall design, they are location, access, visibility, good parking, a good tenant mix and sustainability. These factors together contribute to the mall being successful for the developers, traders and consumer. It has been said that the more time a person spends in the shopping mall, the more she or he spends. So the idea is to bring people in the mall not only for the shopping experience but for the experience of food and entertainment that will keep them there.

#### LOCATION

Location of mall is critical in context to the overall city/town development for the success of the centre. Our cities and metros are not planned cities and have expanded over the period of 50 years. The town centres are very crowded and there is hardly any organised development possible to map these upcoming retail centres. The local body should identify the future locations of these developments which are sustainable and have little or no overlap of catchments. The other factor is the high cost of land, which forces most of retail developments to be multi-level, with the parking on basement or upper decks, which adds to the capital cost. There is a need to adapt to the multi-level designs, which are made easier by the popularity of the cinemas and large food courts that not only provide the bulk for the upper levels, but also a magnet to draw customers to the upper level.



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person. Apart from the anchor stores a mall must try to include major fashion brands, cosmetic brands, food brands and entertainment in its portfolio. As we slowly begin to see the FDI restrictions lifted, this situation can only improve as we will see more and more attractive and innovative brands entering the market place.

### SUSTAINABILITY

Energy efficiency is a major factor and with the kind of technology available in terms of lighting, air conditioning and ventilation can have a positive effect on running costs. Hopefully this kind of education will be passed on to Tenants to include such considerations in their premises, as well as in the common areas. Ofcourse this challenge has to be factored at an extra cost to the client, and if his mode of business is to develop and sell the centre, the likely of absorbing the extra cost will be unlikely. Green buildings see a notable return after at least 5-10 years of the operational cycle of the building. However, this reality can certainly be encouraged by more local authorities introducing certain "green" regulations to help kick start the thought process.

### THE FOOD COURT

In the Indian context, food courts play a big role in being able to add an extra floor to the mall and link your food court to the multiplex. I'm not sure what the figures are for India, but an ICSC survey in the States shows that only 7% of shoppers said they went to the mall specifically to eat. In other words, stopping for a meal becomes only one part of the shopping trip, yet at the same time the study reveals that food service is the second most lucrative segment of non-anchor tenants.

### ACCESS AND VISIBILITY

This aspect gets covered in the location itself. The mall needs to be in an easy to access area to attract footfalls. This requires careful demographic research of the catchment area and the intended target audience. A need for clear and evocative signage externally is imperative for the user to quickly understand major entrances and exits to the centre and the parking. Internally clear lines of sight and visibility of shop fronts is essential in orientation the user. And a good clear well positioned interactive map of the centre helps locate shops at various levels.

The importance of good Environmental Graphics and way finding can not be underestimated. Be it to help a new visitor to better understand the centre or a seasoned visitor to ensure his customer loyalty through new and innovative ways of improving his customer experience.

### PARKING

On the question of parking basements there is somewhat of a challenge in convincing few developers of the need for well-designed parking areas, with good ingress and egress and circulation. Automated parking areas are a definite no-go for retail centres. Customers need the convenience of easy parking to contribute to the whole feeling of a satisfying shopping trip. In India today with many more people being able to afford a car, provision for more spaces has gone up as with the notion of offering multi storey car parking.

### GOOD TENANT MIX

A good tenant mix is the key to delivering a complete customer experience. Ensuring that the mall caters to all age groups and diverse interests will help in increasing the footfalls as well as increasing spends per

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If that is the case, doesn't it make sense to create food courts as comfortable and pleasant as you can for your customers? As mall owners, you want your customers to stay longer, because the length of a shopping trip is directly connected to sales per sq foot. So what can you do to keep your shoppers longer?

- Maybe create different food zones that cater for the different demographics;
- For men, create spaces where their wives will happily leave them watching the cricket while they spend his money;
- Instead of locating the tenants just around the perimeter of the food court, try introducing something like a sushi bar where customers can sit around the bar and watch the food being prepared?
- How about a business centre where men can drop in to observe Bloomberg TV or similar, and surf the internet.

**MIXED USE AND OPEN CENTRES**

As I live and travel in India for longer periods of time, meeting many of its innovative developers, I am happy to see a very different type of retail model emerge. A retail centre that offers more of a public



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face, functions as part of a bigger development and opens its arms externally.

The big faceless internal box of the past is finally being challenged.

As an architect and urban designer it pleases me greatly that see these types of developments coming to the market, promising more of a demographic mix and creating an ambience with a more public face. Such retail centres are proving of interest for a mixture of reasons!

The developer sees it as a vehicle for spreading his risk, by generating a phased approach to the development. For example he may well decide to develop some housing to help fund the retail portion of the development.

Creating external public spaces and squares that form the "heart" of the development. A place where people can sit and eat in covered or shaded area, be they coming from the retail centre or the office building next door! The convenience and understanding of the live, work and play trilogy is becoming an idiom well engraved into the Indian mindset.

As we see infrastructure greatly improve in cities across India, we will see the building of principle transport hubs, such as main line stations. Developing dense mixed use environments around these nodes will generate incredible foot falls. Foot falls that will drive consumption.

Your customer becomes more than just someone driving 5 miles from his residential suburb. She or he is someone who will work close to the retail offering, live near the retail offering. These type of environments form perfect "destinations."

Having now spent almost half of my life in sunlight and the other in darkness as a British citizen, let us not forget the importance of being outdoors in the sun. Ofcourse many from the hotter climates take our basic need for sunlight and the outdoors for granted.

And I firmly believe as long as these external spaces are well orientated providing enough cover we will see a cultural shift in India; as people begin to value more the outdoors as oppose to large air conditioned environments hungry in operational costs at the expense of the environment.

I often site as a good example the urban ingredients and mixed use environment of South Mumbai and its many incredible landmarks; street retail with residential and offices above, cinemas on important corners that become landmarks in themselves, tree lined boulevards and wide colonnaded pedestrian foot paths and large open public spaces.

**CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS**

These are indeed exciting times for Bentel Associates International, ideally positioned to serve two developing continents we find ourselves growing our business in an otherwise challenged Global context. As we strive to capitalize on other international markets and opportunities, we are also expanding our portfolio beyond retail and into other asset classes.

Many mixed use and larger master planning opportunities are allowing us to create role model developments not only within India but that we can showcase around the world. With this expanse into other asset classes and countries, the way in which we drive our retail model forward is also evolving.

Although there are many challenges to developing in the Market Place, there has never been a better opportunity for Bentel to engage with our client, to drive fresh thought across her/his portfolio of projects. Ultimately whatever the asset class, or the design style of the architect, we at Bentel understand not only how to create value for the developer but in creating a humane architecture for the people. ●●