

At the heart of a thriving mall is its manager

maintain and improve the standards of management.

Marketing and leasing

Values of retail space in shopping malls have risen dramatically over the years. The 1970s saw the value of shop units in prime positions at successful shopping centres priced at RM200 to RM250psf. Today, it is from RM3,000 to RM4,000psf. Rentals on the other hand grew from RM2.50psf to RM3psf in the 1970s to RM30psf to RM40psf.

Demand, you can be sure, is high and though the layman's expectation is that such lots can sell itself, it is the responsibility of marketing personnel to ensure that the right tenant/retail mix is achieved.

Marketing and leasing is still the more important function as far as shopping centre owners are concerned simply because they are the ones who bring in the money and prop up the bottom line.

One of the first women managers in the industry, Joyce Yap, currently the director of marketing and leasing for an up-and-coming mega shopping centre in Jalan Bukit Bintang named Pavilion Kuala Lumpur said: "Take for instance Advertising & Promotions (A&P). You must understand that it is not only essential to increasing traffic flow and creating good publicity, it must also be seen as a business solution to improve tenants' sales and used to assist in achieving a defined market position and tenant mix."

"Promotions," she added, "must be effective and efficient and because of current globalisation and intense competition, it is becoming more challenging to create 'the difference' for patrons."

Yap said shopping centre management in the early days was done in a trial-and-error fashion.

"It was more concerned with facility management

as compared to centre management *per se*. There were no feasibility or market studies prior to the construction of a shopping centre, and the management team was not involved during the planning stage.

"The fortunes of a centre was determined by market forces of demand versus supply."

Undoubtedly, things have changed drastically since the early days. Now, centre managers are consulted and their feedback considered even at the conceptual stage; centres are being built to cater to demand and new players consider market research as an important tool for success.

The job is more demanding now and Yap, who's been in the industry since 1982, said the key to her continued presence is "both passion and job satisfaction which can come from either monetary remunerations or recognition".

"You must also be able to continually learn new things to stimulate the mind as well as enjoy cooperation from both stakeholders, bosses and your down-line. The end results must be measurable and instant, otherwise your steam will have run out!"

Visual merchandising

Like A&P, the competition in the Visual Merchandising (VM) aspect of shopping centre management was less competitive in the 1970s and 1980s. This, of course, has changed drastically in tandem with the industry being as a whole much bigger and more sophisticated.

"In most shopping centres, the tenant mix may be similar but you now have to be constantly that

much more creative in order to create a unique and exciting shopping experience," said VM Manager of Mid Valley Megamall Ko Chai Huat.

Ko started his career in VM as a display artist producing backdrops and props to complement the activities in shopping centres. Today, he looks at the bigger picture to ensure that VM both complements and supports promotional activities and create a theme for the entire mall as a whole.

Ko also agrees with Joyce on sticking with the job: "After 16 years, I am still in this line essentially because of my passion for creativity and I am still learning new things continuously."

"A good working environment from reliable and trusting colleagues, peers, subordinates and even bosses who share the same wavelength and vision contributes significantly to my comfort level which, in turn, lends much to creative and fruitful work," he added.

Security

In security, we find that professionalism and technology must go hand in hand. In the "old school" of security, we have someone like Victor Tan, who is currently the security manager of Sunway Pyramid and a veteran in the industry with 26 years of experience.

Starting off as a security manager in Sungei Wang Plaza in 1978, the former police constable has now achieved tremendous

respect for his work over the years. This was what he has to say about the job: "In the old days, everything was done manually, now it is done with high technology! Today,



Commercial viability: A&P is not only essential to increasing traffic flow and publicity, but is also crucial to improving tenants' sales, achieving a defined market position and tenant mix, says Yap.



Mall differentiation: Ko says most shopping centres' tenant mix are quite similar so there is a need to be that more creative in order to create a unique and exciting shopping experience.

automation and high tech applications mean nothing if not done professionally."

The advances in technology have also created a new breed of security managers, a good example of which is Jabaruddin Abu, the assistant security manager of Sunway Pyramid.

Leaving the Royal Malaysian Police as a chief inspector, Jabaruddin had, besides basic police training, been trained in intelligence gathering and interrogation, criminal investigation techniques, court prosecution as well as fire safety and emergency response.

Jabaruddin like others of his technologically savvy generation is highly skilled, but what has remained unchanged from the time Victor started out almost 20 years ago is the same professional work attitude.

Recent cases of crimes in car-parks have driven many public figures to call for CCTVs to be made compulsory. But CCTVs are just another modern tool of the security industry. It is important just as the many other equipment and technological wonders we have today. But in the end, without good personnel to handle them, they are useless.



Professionalism needed: Automation and high tech applications mean nothing if security personnel aren't professional, says Tan.

In conclusion, the term "complex manager" is certainly apt for it also accurately describes the complexity of the task involved in creating a successful mall. This ditty will perhaps give you an idea of what's involved.

What is a shopping complex manager?

He must be a democrat, an autocrat, an acrobat and a doormat,

He must be a sportsman - a footballer, a golfer, a bowler, a tennis player, a dart champion and a pigeon-fancier,

He must be a leader, a McGyver of sorts, an entrepreneur and a singer of fine songs,

swankers and company representatives even though he may have just inspected sewage tanks, garbage disposals, brawls, thefts, arson accidents or written reports,

He must be outside, inside, offside, glorified, sanctified, crucified, stupefied, or cross-eyed
AND if he is not strong, there's always suicide!

Richard Chan is the president of PPK, an association of complex and highrise building managers established in 1984. PPK seeks to promote professionalism, education and training among members of the profession.

Good managers understand that the decisions they make have far-reaching impact

Change is the only constant and malls run the risk of failure if their managers cannot keep up