

## Inside retailing



# The pull factor

Successful malls that create events to draw the crowds not only look good, they also increase shopper spending

By Stanley Kok

Crowds equal business in shopping centres. The question is, what must a shopping centre do to bring in the crowds? How can it ensure that those who walk through its doors are in the mall's target market?

One way to attract target shoppers is to provide them the best shows, latest products or events that will make their shopping experience more exciting and memorable.

## Crowd-pulling events

Promotions and special events are part and parcel of any popular and well-managed shopping centre's marketing plan to attract customers. If well executed, these spectacles have the potential of attracting a large number of customers, with the aim of increasing sales turnover for their tenants. Large and popular shopping centres are always looking at organising such events and try very hard to outdo one another in this area of competition.

Promotions and special events also allow for healthy tenant participation and build better relationships with the building management. Other values include image building and publicity creation. The more exciting and innovative the events held, the greater the chance for media cov-

erage. In the long run, the exposure and publicity generated will be a bonus to the centre.

## Market research

Before any promotion or event is considered as part of a shopping centre's marketing plan, market research should first be conducted. This would prevent the mall from attracting the wrong crowd and incurring unnecessary expenditure. For example, an up-market centre would never bring in a rock band to play during prime time in its foyer as it would deter affluent customers (who do not like loud music and screaming teenagers) from shopping.

But if the right show is brought in at the right time and place, then the image of the centre would be enhanced, with shoppers having an overall "good" feeling. This would encourage them to stay longer and hopefully, spend more than usual. The aim is to have sufficient attractions to entice customers so that they linger longer during their shopping trip, thereby benefitting the retailers as well as the food and beverage outlets.

## Pulling in the right crowd

There are numerous ways of attracting crowds to a shopping centre. The bigger the budget, the better the chances of drawing them in great numbers. But is this solely a numbers game? Certainly

not. Rather, the goal is to fully understand a target market and then create the right event for them, with the aim of benefitting the retailers through increased sales.

A successful shopping centre's management team would have based its yearly promotions and special events plan on the findings of its market research and overall objectives before implementing any programme.

It needs to analyse what its competitors are doing to attract shoppers. However, what works for one mall may not work for another as the demographics and psychographics of target shoppers for each shopping centre differ. So, the more a mall knows its customers, the better its chances of pulling them in.

## Types of promotions and special events

Popular shopping centres usually have a bigger budget for their special events. In the past few years, we have seen international movie or cartoon characters such as Walt Disney's all-time favourites Mickey and Minnie Mouse and their friends, Power Rangers, Ultraman and others who were brought in at great cost. Internationally acclaimed shows were also brought in from China, Taiwan, Mongolia, Australia and Europe.

Usually, these international acts attract certain types of shoppers. The Walt Disney characters, for



**Launch magnet:** The opening of a new component, such as the Fiesta Street in Sungei Wang Plaza in KL, can be an opportunity to bring in the crowds.

instance, are a favourite among children, while adults and teenagers might prefer the acrobatics, cultural dances and contemporary shows from Asia and European countries.

Successful shopping centres are always on the lookout for the "in"

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thing in town and will try to bring this to their shoppers in the hope that they will come to the centre for the shows. Careful planning will enable a mall's management to plan a whole year's programme.

Successful promotions are usually those that result in increased store sales for a wide spectrum of tenants. The retailers can participate by giving out discount coupons, gift certificates or gifts with purchases, for example, in

conjunction with the thrice-yearly Malaysia Mega Sales Carnival.

Contests with attractive prizes are also a good way to draw shoppers to retailers. Shopping centres can provide entertainment of all sorts, such as fashion shows, to showcase popular or up-and-coming fashion stores/designers, dance troupes or popular singers to enhance the shopping experience.

Some tenants are, however, noise sensitive, so the right kind of entertainment programme must be considered at all times or else it would adversely affect their busi-

ness. However, teenagers usually like trendy fashion shows, popular singers or innovative/interactive games where they can participate and have a chance to win prizes on their visits.

Other than sale promotions, the shopping centre can also conduct community events to attract customers who have special interests, such as a charity bazaar before a festive season, where the proceeds go to a home for needy children or old folks. Such charitable events generate goodwill and publicity for the shopping centre which would be seen as a good corporate citizen.

Positioning events such as grand opening of a new retail area or after a refurbishment exercise also draws crowds to the new area and improves the image of the centre. These can be accompanied by a series of fun events and special offers to sustain interest in the mall. These events usually bring in new customers or those who have stopped coming, since they will arouse curiosity.

## Timing of special events

During the festive and school-holiday seasons, there will be a crowd anyway, whether a shopping centre has a promotion programme or not. But management teams can enhance the shopping experience with decorations and events to entice shoppers to increase their per-visit expenditure. That can also build loyalty because of the pleasant experience they have had.

Another strategy is to host special entertainment programmes such as international shows or country promotions during the non-peak and slow sales periods. Also to be considered is the timing of a shopping centre's anniversary event around the period of slow sales as tenants are more than willing to participate in selling off their stock. Anniversary sales coupled with contests having attractive prizes such as condominiums, cars, jewellery sets or cash would motivate shoppers to spend more.



**Cultural attraction:** Popular during the festive seasons, such performances add festivity and enhance the shopping experience.



**The right act:** Shopping centres must organise the right events to attract their target market.

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