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Question of the Month: How is the rise of digital technology changing the retail landscape and consumer expectations? - by Richard Poyant

October 27, 2017 - Retail

Richard Poyant, Poyant Signs

The rise of digital technology is fundamentally reshaping consumer expectations and shifting the function of traditional shopping malls towards useful and entertaining customer experiences. In order to survive in this digital age, many retailers need to reinvent themselves as they are faced with a market drastically different than the one they navigated 10 years ago.

Traditional shopping malls as we know them are changing. A storm of global trends coming together at the same time are causing shopping malls to change the role they play in the consumers' lives. No longer are they primarily about shopping. Now, when customers visit shopping malls, they are looking for experiences that go well beyond traditional shopping. Consumers are gravitating towards mixed-use developments where they can live, shop and work all within walking distance.

As this shift in the shopping experience advances, it is forcing retailers and developers to rethink how they conceive and operate their properties in order to stay relevant, drive growth and boost efficiency.

The successful players are differentiating the consumer offering, with a focus on experience and convenience; transforming the shopping experience by leveraging technology and multichannel strategies, and exploring new formats and commercial real estate opportunities.

Mark Hebert and the team at the Grossman Development Group understand this shift in the retail landscape and have successfully adapted to the change as evident in their recent project – Lakeway Commons.

Lakeway Commons is located at 193 Boston Turnpike in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. Once the home to the locally-owned and revered discount department store Spag's, the spot now offers one-stop shopping and residences in a prime location on busy Route 9 near the UMass Memorial Medical Center.

Lakeway Commons is a 375,000 s/f mixed-use development comprised of 100,000 s/f of retail, 250 apartments, 14 townhomes, and anchored by a 50,000 s/f Whole Foods. Other businesses including Starbucks, Tavern in the Square, Burton's Grill, Visionworks, UniBank, Jenny Boston Boutique, Especially for Pets, Scottrade, Tile Works, Lunch Box, Massage Envy, QDOBA Mexican Eats and Orangetheory Fitness.

The development is designed as a "streetscape" concept; that is, the store's backs face Rte. 9 and fronts are facing inward creating a village feel. With a dedicated bus stop, off-street

parking, and pedestrian access, the development appeals to professionals who work at the UMass Medical Center. Both pedestrian and bicycle lanes provide unfettered access to the site, and a new traffic light enhances accessibility for the surrounding community.

The Grossman Development Group and Construction Management & Builders, Inc. (cm&b) approached Poyant in 2016 to help develop a well-engineered branding program that promotes a positive visitor experience, improves traffic patterns, and reflects the overall brand image of the new development.

In today's competitive retail environment, the strength and relevance of your brand image is more important than ever. Signage plays a major role in the success of any business, and is an untapped opportunity to take advantage of the power of visual communications. Creating an effective visual solution is the first step in an overall business strategy that conveys a clear message of what customers will experience interacting with a brand. Strong visual branding is the most cost-effective way to increase recognition with shoppers.

Poyant's team of branding experts collaborated with Grossman Development Group and cm&b to assess the unique features and needs of the site, develop a branding solution and strategy for permit approval, and successfully achieve regulatory approval for the new branding package which includes three Double Face Internally Illuminated Entrance Pylon Signs.

Poyant fabricated and installed the new entrance pylon signs which feature energy efficient LED lighting systems, and custom masonry by Fernandes Masonry, Inc. creating a vibrant, fresh, bright, and eye-catching signage solution to attract new business and provide customers with confidence in the development's brand.

The project was completed in July of this year, on-time and on-budget, and is considered a huge success by all involved. This massive new mixed-use development is already changing the face of Rte. 9 and is sure to be a new hot spot in Shrewsbury.

Richard Poyant is the president of Poyant Signs, New Bedford, Mass.