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imply put, trading density is the collective total sales a shopping centre achieves for each of its retailers, and consequently, for itself as a whole.

Given the prevailing circumstances in India, to achieve higher sales, a shopping centre has to act not only like a "magnet", but also double up as a "sponge", absorbing the vehicular and foot traffic into the mall; in effect, not congesting but on the contrary, gobbling away road congestion and freeing up the road for a smooth vehicular movement.

Thus, the more vehicles a shopping centre is able to attract, the higher will be the sales, and vice versa. This makes it imperative for a successful centre to have as large a car park as it can manage to have. Under present Indian situation, the ideal number of car parks that a mall should have is much higher as compared to the norms prescribed by most of the local authorities across the country.

Taking Mumbai's example, one should compare the peak load traffic on a Sunday evening at the mall, with the traffic of any of the roads, outside a school at 8.00 a.m. or 2.00 p.m., on Breach Candy, leading to the Breach Candy Hospital, or on New Marine Lines outside Bombay Hospital, or Veer Savarkar Road, outside Hinduja Hospital during any time of the day, or on Tuesday evening outside Siddhivinayak Temple, or the traffic on Lady Tata Road, on a Wednesday, outside the Mahim Church, or on Friday at 2.00 p.m. outside the Jumma Masjid, at Crawford Market, or on a Saturday at 7.00 p.m. outside the Hanuman Temple on L.T. Marg, or at Dadar on Tulsi pipe road at 8.00 a.m., or at any of the metro city airports at 9.00 a.m. or any of the intercity or suburban stations at any time during the day. (Take a cue from the traffic update on radio, 93.5 FM).



Optimise trading density

By Manoj K. Motta

Among various criteria for measuring a thriving shopping centre, one of the most important benchmarks is the "Trading Density", which can be optimised by ensuring smooth vehicular circulation and convenient parking.

It is to be noted here that such places are frequented by people purely out of need, whereas, coming to a particular mall is a decision that they make to shop, hang out, or just spend some good time for which they have multiple options to choose from. And parking is often the first and also the last impression of the overall experience of the customer.

Besides, one must acknowledge the fact that a shopping centre is a very different establishment as compared to an office, IT or a residential building. A shopping centre has not only to plan for soliciting customer inflows, almost throughout the day, but also operationally prepare for goods and merchandise movement, which normally involves

heavy vehicles such as trucks, tempos, container vehicles, waste disposal trucks, gas refilling vehicles, etc. Both these movements, i.e. 'customer' as well as 'goods & service vehicles', need to be managed systematically, along with requisite service yards, macro circulation, movement timing, ceiling heights of car and goods vehicle parking area, or else, the



shopping centre would be severely compromising on the consumer experience, where customer's smooth ingress and egress into and from the centre gets jeopardised.

Despite the rising traffic congestion in Indian cities, real estate development plans continue to proceed oblivious to infrastructure support in the area and the result is scores of mall schemes being conceptualised and developed on 30 and 40 feet wide roads. The auto-rickshaws/taxis dropping and picking up customers to and from the malls, do so right in front of the malls adding to the traffic bottleneck of such narrow roads. It's like a city undergoing an "Arterial Thrombosis"!

While each city prescribes for the number of car parks for shopping centres, which is based upon the vehicular density in a particular time period and the expected growth within a defined time period for that particular city, it is prudent for the

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shopping centre developer to make appropriate estimations in providing this facility, which is crucial to long-term success of the centre. This requirement gets more intensified in centres which do not have surface parking, thus, seeking multiple level basement or multiple level parking below the plinth of the building.

Further, not only the number of potential car parks is of importance, but the entire ingress and egress of all the vehicles including commercial, as well as public transport vehicles, such as taxis, autos etc, at the macro and micro level need to be thought through at the design stage itself. It's important because having to augment the facility later with a higher car park will be a lot more difficult. With respect to the ratio one could easily plan and provide for one car park per 300 sq ft of carpet area.

Moreover, for long term success of the shopping centre, it is pertinent for it to be built on at least a 60 feet wide road, which means that the 'carriage way' net of the foot paths are comprising of two lanes each, on either side of the road.

Malls, which have planned taxi/ auto stands within the parking area – "drop off" or "pick up" stands – will score far higher on the consumer

experience and correspondingly on the "trading density".

At the end of the day, the customer has a great sense of the overall value proportion. Especially, with multiple shopping destinations available to the consumer, she would not compromise on the experience and tend to look for alternatives that provide a hassle free and relaxed shopping ambience.

It is already known that the buying behaviour takes seed in the psyche of the consumer, the moment she decides to consume a particular product or service, the mind makes the 'maps' of negotiating the entire episode right through to the purchase and consumption of the product, merchandise, or service. At that stage, the psyche has already made a choice of the location of purchase. Arguably, for a rational human being, the choice is based on the 'biases and prejudices', formed on the basis of either a great, good, bad, or a poor past experience of having gone to a particular location for shopping.

So, among other aspects, it is imperative for retail environments to have a phenomenal and a hassle free vehicular circulation and car parking arrangement for delightful consumer experience and consequently achieve higher trading density for the benefit of all concerned. ●

About the author:

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