

Marketing in a competitive retail environment

 By [Heidi Franck](#)

14 Feb 2013

As more and more shopping centres spring up, providing savvy consumers with more retail choices than ever before, centres need to be sure they have sound marketing strategies in place to remain competitive and to attract patronage.

As with any other marketing strategy, shopping centre marketing begins with the centre's target market. Research conducted needs to take into account the structure of the customer base in terms of its socio-economic profile, age structure and ethnic composition. Also of vital importance is an investigation into shopper behaviour, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of surrounding centres.

A centre's marketing plan needs to link in with the category of shopping centre that it falls under, though its design, location and tenant mix should already have been developed to suit the market in question.

In order to remain competitive, centres need to establish a strong brand. This is accomplished by highlighting more impressive traits such as size, tenant choice, architectural treatment or special attractions that make it unique. Examples of centres that have managed to develop strong brands include Sandton City and the V&A Waterfront.

Clear and consistent

What is essential is that the marketing of the brand remains clear and consistent. Regular promotions, with a targeted brand message, are a useful way of assisting the centre to remain foremost in the minds of potential customers. The overall customer experience is, of course, essential to the way in which a centre's brand is perceived. This will involve aspects such as customer service level, centre security and ambiance.

In terms of traditional marketing channels, print mediums such as newspapers, magazines and pamphlets are an effective way of generating exposure. However, in order for a centre to thrive, it needs to keep up with changes in technology and should be moving into the electronic space with social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter that will allow them to engage with their loyal client base. Yet when entering the online space one needs to bear in mind that a strong strategy is needed and this should not just be done for the sake of it.

Lack in experience

Most shopping centres tend to leave it up to their tenants to manage their own promotions. This can be difficult, as apart from the nationals, many stores lack the experience to handle their own campaigns. Centres need to be willing to promote themselves as a unified shopping complex and they need to be aware that the establishment of a centre's brand is a long-term initiative that can prove to be costly.

However, in light of the current retail environment and the burgeoning competition for customer spend; a sound promotional plan is not really an optional extra centre owners can afford to forego anymore. Effective marketing of shopping centres or shopping malls is becoming increasingly critical to their future performance.

ABOUT HEIDI FRANCK

Heidi Franck is the Chief Operations Officer of One Property Holdings, a leading South African based property holding group. She is also the MD of Intigra, a company within the group. Aside from her extensive experience and expertise in quantity surveying, Franck is also a asset manager and has managed a number of property portfolios. She believes in an ordered and proactive approach to projects and has a reputation for proficiency and meticulous achievement.

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