

Click & Mortar

Over the last couple of years, the brick & mortar operator has quickly learnt that getting to know a customer's behavioural pattern is the key to engaging them in the shopping mall experience, says **Kanchana V Gokhale**, Senior Manager, Design Development Team, Pioneer Property Zone Services.



Indians typically take to technology like a fish takes to water. With the jugaad approach, a veritable plethora of home-grown apps and indigenous software for practically everything under the sun are used side by side with the most popular ones. New ones are born every day.

Every small business owner, vendor and public transport operator has incorporated technology in its most basic form like the cellphone, smartphone to process orders, seal deals and take advance bookings. They may not have a business degree, but will navigate their requirements with the aplomb of a CEO actively assisted by the tech of his comfort and choice.

The most recent example is the government's 8th Nov 2016 decision which kicked off the demonetisation drive. Rather than let it affect their incomes, the savvy roadside vendors have started accepting pay-

ments through e-wallets like FreeCharge and Paytm, and even credit & debit cards! This is technology penetration at the grass roots level.

ONLINE SHOPPING

Affordability and accessibility have increased with technology. No matter which corner of the country you are located in, the products you aspire for can be delivered to your home even when you do not have a swanky mall nearby. Online commerce hence is hugely popular. The e-commerce business owner does not spend on high-end interiors and high-rent locations; he can just focus on efficient warehouses.

Of course, online purchases have their attendant risks — there could be a mismatch between the colour of an apparel you might have ordered versus what you receive. Some people also get scammed by unscrupu-

lous people in the delivery chain.

Lastly, the touch & feel aspect is the one thing that brick & mortar outlets offer, which is missing in online transactions.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Over the last couple of years, the brick & mortar operator has quickly learnt that getting to know your customers' behavioural pattern is the key to engaging them within the shopping mall experience. One thing the online players have in abundance is data, and they know how to use it best. On the other hand, offline players have an opportunity to create valuable experiences and the vision to capture data early enough, to fight the war between the two platforms (online and offline). The worldwide trend seems to be a well-developed combination of both platforms being offered to the end customer, because as always, "Customer is king".

With various social media platforms in operation, multiple means of interacting directly with your customer base in real time are the norm.

Indian malls closely monitor and respond to customer patterns. They invite the customers to enrol on their social media pages.



KANCHANA V GOKHALE, Senior Manager, Design Development Team, Pioneer Property Zone Services.

Customers receive basic updates for their events, ongoing offers as well as online contests that win shopping vouchers.

This process collects real time data of customer behaviour and preferences. Most customers are analysed from their social media behaviour; what they like, who they follow, and their connections. The future is not far when a certain amount of customised shopping will be offered to a high value customer based on the findings. Location-based targeted advertising is already prevalent. For example, intuitive offers based on frequently purchased goods can be routed to the customer's Facebook account.

“Existing setups, by virtue of being built before the online boom, are restricted. The gold mine of such data available to the retailers needs to be analysed to be effectively used.”

Most successful malls have their own app, which interacts with customers throughout the year, all the while engaging the customers for an immersive mall experience. Some have offers inviting online shopping through the mall app of in-mall merchandise with coupons to encourage people to take part in a campaign. That is combining the best of both worlds.

TECHNOLOGY IN MALLS

International players have integrated technology smoothly to increase the experience quotient of their customers with the following:

- Pre-order facility (to avoid crowds);
- Personalised suggestions for apparel and accessories (for the fashion conscious shopper with no time to explore options);
- Home delivery (no parking worries);
- No queues (time saved).

This is where technology with exciting innovations can provide value. A single LCD graphic is not just presenting a digital ad. It is measuring responses, tracking footfalls, sometimes monitoring which portion of the ad received the most views.

These are sometimes paired with hi-res cameras, which are typically accepted as part of the mall

environment as a default security feature. These monitor demographics like gender, age and ethnicity.

Thus, real time information has been made easily collectable and actionable. Currently this technology is offered with a Web browser-based interface which generates reports as required. It is already available in India.

Wi-Fi beacons and RFID tags are other technology aids employed by successful malls to capture consumer behaviour data.

Another technology upgrade, which is easily doable, would be higher bandwidths at the Point of Sales to ensure shorter queues. One jugaad worth mentioning, noticed in hypermarkets was to aid customers paying with corporate meal voucher packs. Separate tables were set up to count the different vouchers in advance, while the customer awaited her turn, ensuring shorter exit time.

While we realise that most existing setups are restricted by virtue of being built before the online boom, the potential gold mine of such data available to the retailers needs to be captured and analysed to be used more efficiently and effectively used.

However, the real challenge is from the consumers, because only 30-40 per cent of the data can be tapped, while the rest of the generated figures are guesstimates. Across India, different regions exhibit different behavioural patterns, which in turn makes

it even more complicated to be able to try to predict customer behaviour.

THE PPZ INITIATIVE

Over the last five years, Pioneer Property Zone (PPZ) Services, a development and management consulting company in India operating predominantly in the retail real estate segment, has been developing its in-house tools to manage its various malls across India. Some of these platforms are PPZ proprietary and some have been developed in collaboration with the finest in the world. PPZ is ensuring that it caters to the needs of its clients (developers & institutional investors) as well as creating an engaging platform for the end consumers of its malls; widening its horizon, from being merely a shopping destination. The highest discernible advantage for PPZ has been streamlining of information, real time retrieval of shopping centre statistics (footfalls, parking, retailer performance) as well as a leaner, more efficient management team.

Multiple modules exist within our proprietary app which help centres and even retail stores to track their efficiencies on a real-time basis, tracking budgets with in-built and automated checkers.

FOR OUR RETAILERS

In our newer centres, we encourage our retailers to incorporate at least two features of digital interactive experience for the customers. Both the store and the centres hence increase their experience quotient.

Of course, for including any digital interactive element, the infrastructure provided by the centre has to be up to the mark. A magic mirror for example, allows a customer to try on a look, experiment with colours, mix and match without the physical fitting room. But this means the store inventory and available stock in storage has to be updated in real time. Hence the fibre optics and the broadband have to be a robust connection. Once the customer has made a choice, the response time of the store representative has to be fast to get the right selected items to the payout counter. Failure in either will undermine the experience for the customer.

However, being tech savvy has its dividends!

About The Author

Kanchana V Gokhale is Senior Manager, Design Development Team, Pioneer Property Zone Services. Gokhale has over 15 years of experience in architecture and interiors with projects ranging from offices, hospitality and now retail. She is also an accredited LEEDS IGBC professional working on projects which aim to achieve green ratings. She has been with the Design and Development team at PPZ for nearly seven years now.

