

RETAIL INSIGHT RLI

Creating destination synergy

SHOPPING CENTRE BRANDING IS ABOUT REPUTATION AND IMAGE, SAYS **CLIVE WOODGER**, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF SCG LONDON, AND DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL DESTINATION BRAND REQUIRES THE CAREFUL ALIGNMENT OF EVERY CONTRIBUTING ACTIVITY TO CREATING A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL INVOLVED

Destination brands face the increasingly complex challenge of synchronising diverse vested interests with their different priorities, aspirations and values. The creation and sustaining of a successful real estate venue brand should be a synergy of architecture, environment, marketing, communication media and people culture to provide the right consumer experience.

This involves a wide range of parties and skills; as a brand consultant and qualified architect, I have a foot in the camps of both marketing hype and the professional esoteric, although I find the excess in both sectors embarrassing. Brand vocabularies — 'brand vision', 'essences', 'DNA', 'added-value terminologies', 'unique and emotional selling points' — can be pretty scary for the uninitiated. Equally, architectural jargon and claims to spatial awareness and style sensitivities can confuse what should be clear decisions. Every consultant activity must meet basic commercial criteria. Will it enhance the target audience's perception? What is the potential payback?

I have to speak, understand and translate the professional languages of both disciplines, but often find some agency and consultancy motives, arguments and solutions can lose the point. Shopping centre development is a sector that increasingly demands a fusion of branding and building skills, together with retail art and science.

As a business brand, a centre or chain of centres can represent a range of companies and activities that need to be coordinated and communicated. This presents the challenge of combining the centre and business partner brands as a joined-up proposition to provide the desired first-choice attributes, values, business aims and practices now demanded by the market and society. This is where it gets interesting.

So how to reach a centre brand synergy? A basic rule in multi-brand operations is to ensure all company brands involved in a combined offer — owner, developer, tenant, partner, consultant/supplier, own brand — are mutually enhancing. This is a vital test for centres, department stores and large multiples. The equation is simple, even if the reality can be difficult to achieve:

Tenant/Partner Brand + Consumer Centre Brand + Business Owner/Management Brand = unique added value for all parties = Brand Centre Equity!



CLIVE WOODGER

Developers and managers need to review how their profile and image can be best coordinated to allow full potential centre brand equity. Surprisingly, this next level of brand strategy is still not fully recognised and exploited. Links to respective parties' websites do not provide a convincing, coordinated voice and message, and can expose different values and approaches of collaborating companies.

With the growth of the savvy shopper and the incredible kick-in effect of the ethical and environmental issues, bland brand statements are increasingly unconvincing. Marks & Spencer's 'look behind the label' campaign creates an interesting parallel for the shopping centre sector; consumers are now looking at who is responsible for the brand and how it is resourced and managed. The dividing line between B2B and B2C is increasingly blurred as the business interests behind a brand have become an increasingly important differentiator for the consumer.

Retailers have discovered that differentiation is increasingly about brand values and behaviour not just their product offer and the property sector needs to equally embrace changing society attitudes.

The accessibility and transparency of the web presents major opportunities and challenges. At one time, the

Internet was seen by many as just a useful accessory to the physical destination. Apart from marketing it now enables insight into the centre's vision, values and management. The reality of the website and/or blog can either enhance and underwrite a positive visit experience or totally undermine and invalidate a hard-won satisfied perception and reputation.

The real estate sector recognised the need for proactive branding relatively late compared to other markets. Now it has the opportunity to move quickly from treating branding as a simple marketing activity towards developing a coordinated business strategy.

A positive branding strategy and concept is now an essential where there is a choice of venue for a shopper, tenant or stakeholder. Reputation is what people say about you, not what you say — that's a real brand image and equity.

