

# Does “Retail-tainment” Draw More Shoppers?

Mall survey focuses on the role of tourist attractions

A seven-acre amusement park fills the center of the giant Mall of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Superstition Springs Mall in Apache Junction, Arizona has an arboretum, a playground and an amphitheater. The current trend in mall design includes any combination of these venues plus movie theaters, themed restaurants, museums, and other non-retail businesses. Why? To draw more shoppers, of course.

But when people visit a mall's tourist attractions, do they really come to shop in the surrounding stores as well? Or do they just leave after the entertainment ends? Many individual stores already have begun to feature entertainment right alongside their merchandise—teen shopping departments play wide-screen music videos; housewares sections advertise cooking tips on televisions placed next to the pots and pans. Taking the entertainment full-scale and moving it outside the stores and into the heart of the mall itself has been the next step, but does it work?

“Retailing is very competitive in this country, says Mary Ann Eastlick, a professor in the Division of Retailing and Consumer Studies at The University of Arizona. “There are too many stores and too many shopping centers.

“It has been estimated that there is now between 18 and 19 feet of retail space for each person in the United States,” Eastlick says. “This has created a lot of pressure in what they call ‘B’ and ‘C’ shopping malls. These are malls that have lower sales volumes per square foot; they are usually older and need more renovation. They need anchors or don't have the location an ‘A’ mall has.”

Eastlick, along with Professors Sherry Lotz and Soyeon Shim, and doctoral student Patti Warrington, are conducting a survey of 350 shoppers at each of four malls (a total of 1400 consumers) in cities across the southern portion of the U.S. These include Orlando, Florida; Charlotte, North Carolina; Phoenix, Arizona; and San Diego, California. The International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), a trade association for shopping centers, is sponsoring the research.

Mall owners are looking for ways to build traffic in their malls, even in ‘A’ malls, and entertainment is one of their key ideas, according to Eastlick. This combination of both retail and entertainment formats under one roof is known as ‘retail-tainment.’ But is this enough incentive for people to shop and be entertained during the same visit? And does it encourage future mall patronage? Ask the customers.

“Our proposal is to conduct mall intercepts in cities that appeal to winter tourists and that also have a large local clientele,” Eastlick says. Shoppers, who must be 18 or older, will be intercepted in at least two places in the mall by mall survey personnel. (Typically, most malls have their own data collection services on-site, and don't allow others in.) The interviewers are using a questionnaire developed from focus group interviews conducted by the Arizona research team, in conjunction with advice from a research mentor from the ICSC.

The interviews, held in January 1998, are timed to ensure that winter tourists will be included. The interviewers will vary their data collection by time of day and day of the week to obtain a good cross-section of visitors.

Three main objectives drive the research: 1) To determine whether consumer-oriented factors impact cross-shopping behavior through consumers' degree of involvement in entertainment and/or shopping activities, 2) To assess the long-term impact of entertainment-based venues on future patronage of a mall, and 3) To develop profiles of consumers who shop and those who do not.

Eastlick notes that although many shopping centers are now looking to incorporate entertainment into their strategy to maintain economic advantages, there have not been any empirical studies done to find out whether or not this works.

According to the researchers, this study can shed light on customer attitudes toward shopping and entertainment. It can help identify benefits of adding entertainment businesses to a mall's mix in terms of cross shopping, increased expenditures, and future patronage intentions. In addition, findings will contribute developing theories regarding patronage behavior and cross shopping in malls that have a mix of entertainment-based businesses.

“The main impact of our research will be on economic development,” Eastlick says. “The area of influence is the strategic plan for retailing in malls.”

Because one of the malls under study is in Arizona, the results of this study can directly impact decisions made regarding entertainment in malls right here in the state.

— Susan McGinley

