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By Carol Todreas, Todreas-Hanley

What elements are essential for a successful retail project?

Picture this: bustling crowds, the swish of shopping bags, lanes of lighted, glass storefronts, fresh air, umbrella-ed cafes, colorful signs, and the familiar sounds of a New Orleans blues maestro tinkling the ivories. The happy crowds wind their ways through the lanes, explore and shop the stores, stop for a drink, munch some popcorn, watch each other, and eventually after a few well-spent, satisfying hours are homeward bound until the next outing. Such a picture comes to mind when I consider a successful retail project. Now is this Main St., USA or Shopping Center 102—I believe it is, should be, can be both.

As this image develops and then resonates, the perilous path to getting there starts to emerge. Thus, successful resolution means in simple industry-speak: SATISFIED SHOPPERS returning frequently, spreading the word as gospel. But, to get to the bucks, it can-



not stop there. It also means merry merchants continually updating their wares, responding cheerfully to the needs and demands of the market; forward thinking developers and owners forever caring and ready to update and change with the tides of the retail market; and, last, but not least, beneficent public governance poised to listen, support, and provide assistance in a reasonable time frame and manner.

Peeling away the layers, the basic challenge of getting there be it a downtown revitalization of several worn blocks of dilapidated buildings, a mixed-use waterfront with marina, condos, shops and restaurants, a tired university student center, or an old and almost vacant conventional mall, the issues and steadfast components are roughly the same. In a nutshell:

- Merchandise that appeals and suits the customer.
- Tenants that collectively provide the merchandise.
- Design that unifies, delights, and yet is leasable.
- Market niche and leasing plan that permits a variety of tenant types.
- Flexible and well-capital-

ized owner entity, capable of offering tenant incentives.

- Development team interpreting the subtleties of the trade area and demographics.

- Location capable of reflecting the most advanced environmental standards.

Now, how does this differ from the classic version of shopping center 101 as in the old days when requirements mainly consisted of following a demographic formula, lack of nearby competition, great highway access, some curb cuts, two or three anchors, a host of mall rats, a fenestration-free facility floating in a sea of parking spaces?

Let's take a shot at the answer with a snapshot of the market and some key trends: Folks today are time starved, many working two jobs when they can, tired of sitting in traffic, desiring a sense of community with friends and family. They are tired of stuff. They have had it with telemarketers, marketing gimmicks, canned entertainment, and themed stores and restaurants. They are constantly being told to eat less and walk more. They worry about terrorists, need to feel free to come and go with ease,

and want a change from the same old thing they have seen over and over again in each mall they have shopped in the past decade.

So to be successful the new retail projects need locations where residential and office development can be close. This translates to thinking neighborhood and district, multi-use; e.g., cultural, civic, recreational, public transit, bike and pedestrian connections to housing and work. It translates to a creative approach to development that avoids the clichés of the same-old-been there tenants with an eye to fresh new smaller, and often local stores, independently owned and operated to spice the mix, and creative mass merchants who offer value and promotions. It means that merchants at every level are selected for their ability to satisfy customers in the trade area. It means catering to the individual and making certain the entire experience has been well worth the effort and expense. Then, if we build it, they will come.

Carol Todreas - Principal, Todreas Hanley Associates, Inc., a Boston-based retail consultant
Email: carol@todreas.com