

Primedia Lifestyle future proofing its malls



By [Doug Mayne](#)

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Current tight market conditions have forced the retail property marketing specialist to be more innovative than ever before to ensure a healthy return on investment for clients.

The retail property space has not been unaffected by the global economic downturn that has hit the retail sector in the last year or so. As a result, there has been an increase in tenant vacancies and a drop in revenue for property management companies. We, in turn, have been pressurised to increase shopper footcount in the hope of higher retail sales. We have also had to constantly justify marketing spend and achieve specific KPIs.

Fortunately, and contrary to common perception, retail marketing is an obsessively measurable discipline which is a good thing given that current market conditions force us to be more accountable. They also force us to innovate and find new ways of doing things driven by the imperative of increasing return on investment (ROI).

What's in a name? A lot!

One of the most interesting aspects of this innovative urgency has been the development of our approach to sponsorship. Instead of being a once-off occurrence, sponsorships have now become annual events with a strong consumer following. A key spin off of this approach is the concept of naming rights sponsorship that we pioneered three years ago. We experienced such positive growth in this arena, that we have created a new business, Mall Fusion, that now focuses on this and events/activations, promotional court bookings and exhibitions.

Excellent examples of our leadership in the naming rights space is the recent Vodacom Durban July Fashion Experience at Gateway and our annual Beach Event at Menlyn Mall in Pretoria which is in its fourth successful year. Interestingly, both of these were also Silver award winners at this year's international Solal awards.

Mobile madness

Most centres now have their own mobile apps or mobisites. The importance of this type of technology cannot be overestimated, given that it's a key element of any conversion process that can still take place as mobile now provides marketers with an opportunity to influence consumers in the last retail mile in the mall environment.

The fact that it empowers people through knowledge also creates a savvy shopper and enables more informed conversations to take place between shoppers and sales assistants.

It does, however, also put pressure on retailers to up their game as in certain cases consumers now know as much, if not

more, than their own staff!

We're also investing in our clients' mobile future to give shoppers the ability to make purchases using smartphones. We're currently working with Bidvest, via our digital division Source, to create software that allows a smartphone to link to a point of sale.

What's most important to realise is that this approach isn't years or months away - it's imminent.

The world of wi-fi

Increased internet access via smartphones also means far more consumers in the middle market are now able to engage in internet usage especially in light of the availability of wi-fi access which is set to be available in malls in the next few months.

In the past, wi-fi access was poor in public spaces and in certain cases people had to pay for C-Grade or a maximum B-Grade connectivity speed. This will change now that proper networks are being installed in shopping centres.

Free wi-fi in malls also represents a key opportunity for retailers to connect with their target market since once consumers use wi-fi, location based transaction, marketing and retail services can come into play.

Facebook focus

We have recognised how powerful Facebook is as a personal touch point for the shopping centre brands that we represent. It's a strong loyalty-building device and has the ability to boost the measurability of individual campaigns. Through our Source division and the individual marketing teams at each centre we have the ability to populate each site/Facebook page with content and some of our larger centres have large Facebook following. For example, Gateway Theatre of Shopping has more than 11,200 fans, Riverside Mall (Nelspruit) 7,874, Tyger Valley Centre 6,274 fans, Cavendish Square 5,726 and Eastgate is just under the 1000 mark.

Facebook also allows us to showcase tenant offerings and offer discounts or freebies. The recent co-branding partnership between the Good Food and Wine Show and Cavendish Square and our Gateway Vodacom Durban July campaign are both excellent examples of the ability that Facebook has to be a very effective marketing tool.

ABOUT DOUG MAYNE

Doug Mayne, MD of Primedia Lifestyle, founded his marketing and advertising career at Ogilvy Durban, where his leadership qualities ensured his progression from account executive to group account director. Joining Primedia Lifestyle in 2007 as KZN regional marketing manager, Doug was appointed MD in July 2011. His particular area of interest is the digital and CRM space within retail, and the use of mobile, social and loyalty tools to drive customer engagement and personalised retail experiences. Website www.primedialifestyle.co.za.

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