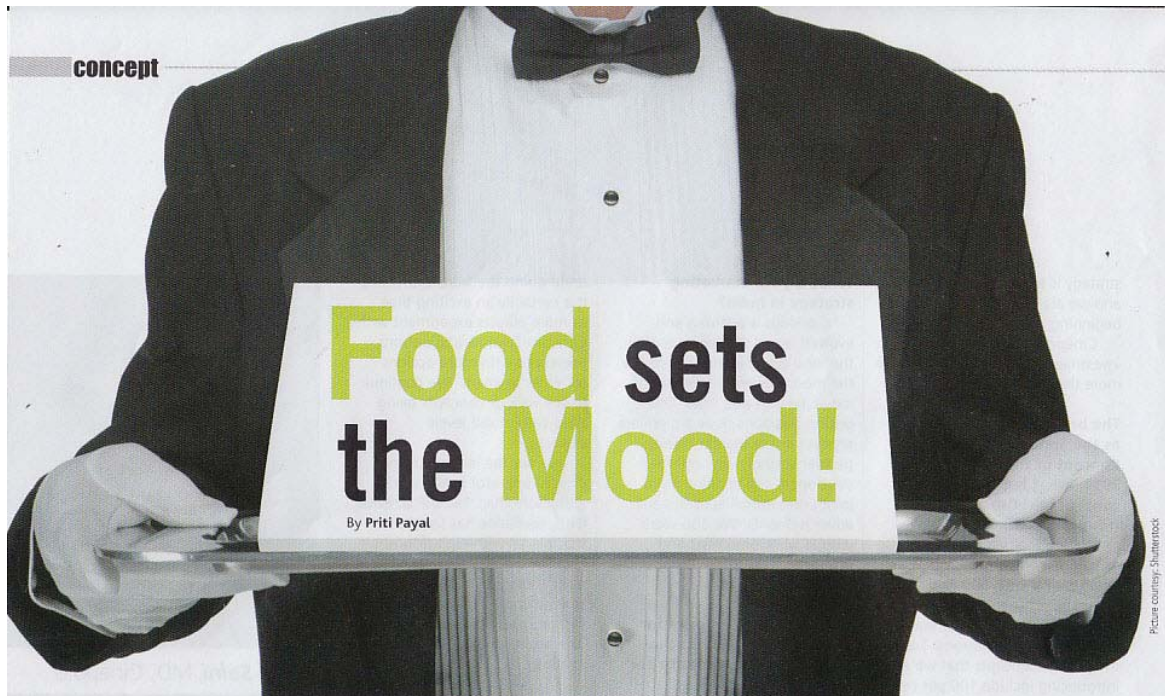


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An anchor in its own right, the Food and Beverage category in malls is said to bring in combined footfalls and revenue per sq ft which would be far higher than anchors like cinema, anchor retailers or the hypermarket. Moreover, food has the unique potential to attract people from far off locations, more than any other factor. According to Benu Sehgal, VP & mall head, DLF Place, Saket, "A mall cannot do without food zone because shopping is everything to do with leisure, and leisure is everything to do with eating outside. You cannot retain your customers in a mall till the time you have a good food zone, which is a deciding factor for success."

Food zone – footfall & sales driver

F&B is an important criteria for a mall's popularity as it drives traffic and ensures more dwell time of the

sales that happen in the mall. There are times when visitors just come for a quick meal or come for a good dining experience but also end up shopping. In our experience a good

the mall to convert these footfalls into actual sales."

Sehgal adds, "You might have the same brands in two different malls in the same locality but if the food and the cinema is good, the customer retention value of the mall increases."



Vivacity, Mumbai

consumer in the mall, not only in India but also abroad. According to Payal Chopra, director, PS Srijan Group, "Dining experience and food has come a long way in the last few years. In India, specifically, it can be a main driving force in generating high footfalls in a shopping mall."

There is a direct relation between footfall and sales. "The better the food zone, the higher the

food zone can increase the sales of a shopping centre by minimum 25 per cent by driving greater footfall," says Chopra.

Susil Dugarwal, chief mall mechanic, Beyond Squarefeet Advisory says, "Since food courts are slowly evolving as key anchors, a good food court can drive a mall's footfall up by about 20 to 25 per cent. It is thereafter the prerogative of the retailers and the occupants of

Need for innovation

Typically, the food zone of even successful malls in India cannot be called very innovative. In an effort to make a difference, a couple of ambitious new and upcoming malls have tried innovative approaches in planning their food zones. Some of those malls discussed here are The Grand in Chennai, and Vivacity and Neptune Magnet Mall in Mumbai. While The Grand is coming up with an altogether separate food street called The Grand Arcade, Vivacity and Neptune Magnet mall have tried to be different from the other malls in terms of design, brand mix and positioning of their food zone.

The Grand, Chennai's Food street

The Grand is preparing for a May 2012 launch in Chennai. Apart from hosting restaurants,

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F&B is clearly an integral part of a retail development and at times a decisive factor in the success or failure of a mall. As the same old trick repeated too often loses its charm, innovation is the way forward. New and upcoming shopping destinations have plans to impress the customer, but differently!

The Grand Arcade, Chennai



entertainment zones and retail shops, it will also have a food street named 'The Grand Arcade'. Built with an investment of Rs 30 crores, the food zone is spread across 30,000 sq ft area comprising independent standalone structures with areas ranging from 1500 to 3500 sq ft.

The Grand Arcade will be separate from the food court located on the fourth floor. The food street will have independent units set up in a row along the street outside the mall. The concept has been inspired by the Clarke Quay area in Singapore.

According to Chopra, "The food street has great visibility from the shopping mall and the main road, which is a requirement for most restaurants. The food street will offer cafe lounges, casual and fine dine varieties so that people will have all the options to select from. Friends can catch up at a cafe after a shopping spree, colleagues can grab a quick lunch during a work day or unwind with friends over dinner. Families can come for a meal before or after a movie without having to drive and deal with Chennai traffic."

The food street has been kept separate from the mall because of two reasons: Firstly, people don't want to deal with the crowd and noise inside a mall when they are sitting down for a relaxed meal with their friends and family. Secondly, if someone just wants to have a meal, they need not navigate through the mall traffic to get to a restaurant.

Neptune Magnet Mall's two-level food court

Designed on an experimental basis, the food court at Neptune Magnet Mall has been planned to offer the consumer a wide

Neptune Magnet Mall, Mumbai



spectrum of cuisines and options spread over a large area, giving a feeling of opulence. As per the mall management, the concept of two-level food court emerged keeping in mind the competition. The catchment made them think of innovating and also taking advantage of the height of the mall, which at the food court level is about 58 ft.

"The two-level food court is spread across a gross leasable area of 70,000 sq ft thereby making it one of the biggest food courts in the country. It's design resembles an atrium of a 5-star hotel, which has been done to give an everlasting impression to the consumer with an ambiance which only a few malls could envisage," said Dungarwal. He added, "Apart from investing a huge Capex for the food court which is about Rs 10crore, we have also invested a lot of efforts and planning, thereby making this food court a benchmark for the mall industry."

According to him, there are hardly any malls worldwide with such a concept of a two-level food court. "The inspiration to create such a concept was primarily to make it a USP and at the same time

it is also an experiment, which if successful will surely have others following the leader by example," Dungarwal said.

A part of the food court is to become operational with the soft launch of the mall in mid January, 2012. The entire food court, however, would open by March, 2012 when the mall is expected to be formally launched.

Open-air dining at Vivacity, Mumbai

A courtyard plaza with tall fountains welcoming the customers at the main entrance itself with a rich landscape and outdoor food kiosks along with an open-air seating area is to be the USP of the food zone in Vivacity mall. Ashwin Sheth, MD, Vivacity Mall, Sheth Developers & Realtors said, "An area of nearly 40,000 sq ft at Vivacity is devoted to titillate the taste buds of hungry shoppers. On entering the imposing structure one finds himself beneath a large atrium that filters in plenty of natural light, clear-storey glazing as high as 16 ft long continuous running length of roof." The mall also has a 16,000 sq ft large food court that can seat up to 1200 people with a tapered roof which gives it the casual, yet sophisticated atmosphere of open-air dining. Even the food court of the mall has been made to look grand boasting of an average height of 35 ft and the clear-storey glazing coupled with the extra height emitting a pleasant sense of space and openness.

Brand Mix

A mall can be very innovative in designing its food zone, but the ultimate success will depend upon the quality of the food and variety in the food mix. According to

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concept

Benu Sehgal, "In today's mall, the food mix is all about the marriage of Puri and Pizza. Fusion food, most experimented in the mall, will never be found in standalone restaurants. As per my personal experience, in a perfect food zone there should be 25 per cent Indian food, 15 per cent Chinese, 15 per cent bakery items, 25 per cent Western fast foods like Pizza Hut and Domino's and the rest should be experimental food like Thai, Continental, etc."

"To ensure that the entire family can dine out at the Neptune Magnet Mall, we have created a unique brand mix of both national and international QSRs, and also given emphasis on the local cuisine and operators. This will create a brand mix which will equally attract all the three generations of a family," says Susil Dugarwal.

At Vivacity, there are food stores and restaurants at all levels to cater to the shoppers' need for a quick bite or a restful meal. According to Sheth, "In Vivacity, from Italian pizzas and pastas, American burgers and fries, Japanese sushi and Chinese fast food, to South Indian dosas, North Indian tandoor, Delhi street chats, thalis and an endless variety of deserts, there's sure to be a flavour from every corner of the world."

The Food Arcade at The Grand, will also offer a wide variety of cuisines but in a restaurant format. "We have signed McDonald's and Creamy Inn for the food street and are in discussions with multiple brands like Papa Johns, Subway, Sukh Sagar, Kobe to name a few. On the other hand, the food court of the mall will predominantly be a fast food zone with self-service format offering lower value meal options," said Payal Chopra.

Design

Design plays a very important role when it comes to innovative style of the food zone in a mall and convenience of the visitors is said to be the biggest criterion taken into consideration while designing the food zone.

The architecture of Grand Arcade at The Grand is by Eskay Designs from Chennai and Ong &

Ong from Singapore are doing the landscape designing. They have ensured the ease of the visitors by having a valet parking, which will enable a visitor to get dropped off at their food joint and the car can be parked in the basement of the mall. Those shopping in the mall will not have to drive anywhere to get to a restaurant; they can simply come out of the mall and walk into the food street. There is a separate entry created specifically for the customers coming to dine at the food street.

The food court ideation and implementation at Neptune Magnet Mall has been done jointly by Neptune Developers, Forrec (Canadian Architects) and Beyond Squarefeet. The mall too emphasised on the convenience to the customer wherein they have provided exclusive vertical transportation without compromising on the ambiance. The food court is 100 per cent wheel chair accessible and has a 360 degree panoramic view while the upper level of the food court oversees the lower level of the food court as well as the FEC. According to Dugarwal, the 58 ft height will add to the ambiance of the food court by creating a voluminous space unlike other malls where food courts are the most cramped places.

In Vivacity mall, the inline store units in the food court are visible from all angles giving a sense of continuity to all the restaurants in the food court. The roofing systems adopted for all atria and the food court consists of excellent acoustics and heat insulation values supported by stunning truss designs.

Challenges

These mall developers unanimously agreed that the planning of infrastructure and back-end for innovative food zones is and shall remain a challenge. However, Dugarwal opined that with the help of experts all the challenges can be addressed. According to Chopra, the biggest challenge for the Food Arcade was that it is the first-of-its-kind in India. The mall will try to offer cuisines from around the world,

however, they will try to get one restaurant to offer one type of cuisine. "We don't want multiple restaurants serving the same cuisine and therefore we want to get the best brand in place to represent the cuisine. This offers the visitors an array of cuisines in one street where they don't have to drive at all," says Chopra. Regarding the presence of both food court and special food zone present in The

Looking ahead

Chopra is confident about the success of The Grand Arcade because of the perfect planning and strategies adopted for the same. "Brands with a vision appreciate the unique concept easily and are eager to be part of it. Everyone we have spoken to till date has been extremely excited about this idea and can easily think of the benefits of a shopping mall and



Grand, she asserts that this will not undermine their individuality as the food court caters to the need of shoppers and also movie goers who will visit the food court because they are time and budget conscious. The food street is designed for those who want to enjoy their meal in a relaxed setting and don't have time and money constraints.

Talking on the same, Sehgal added, "Even the food court and Food Chowk, which were present in DLF Place, Saket had healthy competition, but they were not cannibalising each other. In a situation like this, the mall becomes a food destination." According to Sehgal, the challenges are more technical in order to make the food zones viable for the customers. Marketing and leasing are the other factors affecting the food zone as it has to be clearly demarcated to be placed in the particular catchment and the leasing team has to make a proper pie chart and decide the percentage of the food types.

food street being part of the same development," she says.

Neptune Magnet Mall's ideation and implementation of its two-level food court has also met with appreciation of the industry/food court operators who "have shown great enthusiasm," says Dugarwal. "Since we are very sure about the success of this concept, we are already planning a similar multi-level food court in some of our projects across India and Nepal. We are also helping certain IT companies and large office complexes in ideation, planning and implementation of some standalone food courts which will cater to the work force of the company/complex," he adds.

"DLF is coming up with 'Hub' – entirely dedicated to the food vendors. It's located in Gurgaon and is spread across approximately one lakh sq ft area," confirms Sehgal emphasizing that "a special food zone can in fact be a separate entity by itself." Well, anyone with more food for thought? ●