

It pays to put customers first

Michael Sherlock

THE most complex of retail property issues can be reduced to a simple realisation – “remember it’s the customers’ needs that have to be catered for”.

Over the years I have been both a retailer and shopping centre developer which has enabled me to see how a deal stacks up on both sides.

Ideally, both should be in a win-win position.

In the current ever-changing and challenging retail environment both parties have to remember – it’s all about the customers.

These are my four com-



difficult balancing act. Parking should be free for the first 180 minutes in suburban retail centres and cheaper for CBD shoppers.

It’s OK to stop the park-and-ride crowd but not at the expense of discouraging genuine shoppers.

The other big no-nos are steps in front of a tenancy, garden beds and cattle-style access ramps.

Exposure: The centre/store and signs should be well exposed to all passing cars and pedestrians. Potential customers should be able to, at a glance, identify the retail offer.

Planting of trees and shrubs should be selective to provide

shade or ground cover – not hide shops.

The truth is that branding and signage is king. Retail architects must remember the store owner will be there long after they have moved on with their poney ideas.

Tenancy mix: Developers need to group compatible traders together so they can trade off each other and make it easier for shoppers to compare.

I like the Hong Kong idea of having all competitors next to each other like you see in the Hardware Streets and also have customer-friendly planning like a bakery next to newsagent as they are both early morning traders.

Ant trail: Every shopping centre develops its own ant trail where customers naturally walk in and move around.

This ant trail has to be designed to eliminate the dead spots where customers don’t naturally walk.

Online shopping has created a radically new ant trail and bricks and mortar retailers and centre owners need to respond more creatively.

If a centre developer can provide these four “commandments” to retailers then they have a chance of attracting shoppers and create a profitable retail community.

I have opened shops where the environment is right and

the store is still trading strongly, never missing its rent for over 30 years like in Kenmore Plaza. But when short-sighted developers get it wrong everyone suffers.

It’s a win/win situation for both retailers and developers/centre owners if they meet the challenge to attract customers, especially in this new and rapidly changing environment.

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