

by Evelyn Lo

**THE** shopping mall industry in Malaysia is sizeable and growing. In fact, some of our prominent malls are ranked among the top 10 largest malls in the world – 1 Utama, Sunway Pyramid and Mid Valley.

Everyone knows what shopping in the country is about; as many as one in five people residing in the Klang Valley are at a mall on weekends, especially during the school holidays.

Shopping is known as “retail therapy” but apart from enjoying chic designer clothes, an enticing variety of food and popular entertainment outlets, have you ever wondered what makes shopping malls tick?

Malls have evolved from being merely central locations at which to purchase merchandise or seek services and do weekend errands to being essential to community life.

When malls are in mixed developments as is usual nowadays, they function as a gathering place for a multitude of activities. They are not only for retail therapy but also for F&B, entertainment and socialising, services and amenities, one-stop payment, art and culture, workouts and relaxation, visiting theme parks and more.

#### Suitable atmosphere

Malls may have become luxurious, essential places to visit but the onus is on shopping mall managers and their teams to make everything work at the right time in the right place. This happens back-of-house, away from shoppers looking for discounts and indulging in cosy rendezvous at fashionable cafes.

The mall's team is involved in the three major aspects of mall management: Marketing and leasing, operations and maintenance, and administration.

Marketing and leasing personnel are usually frontliners, meeting shoppers and business owners or operators; they are essential to creating “experiential shopping”. This means apart from being a place at which to buy, the mall offers a suitable atmosphere for shoppers to touch, see, hear and experience goods and services, to contribute to their well-being and the inclination to linger, if not shop.

The ambience involves well-thought-out, sophisticated decor for festive seasons with exciting events for the family. Mall personnel are under pressure to create something new, unique and identified with a particular mall.

Promotions and discounts must be coordinated among merchants; this requires detailed preparation.

The marketing department usually includes personnel involved in events, promotions, public relations, design,



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## The people who make shopping malls rock

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advertising and concierge services, which are all closely related.

Any mall management team must be aware of its location – whether it is in the city centre or suburban – and aim astutely for its market, whether for shoppers of luxury goods, working people, families or simply being the neighbourhood mall.

With this in mind, leasing personnel interact with potential business operators and retailers, and are important to achieving the right merchandise and tenant mix for the mall's target market.

Operations and maintenance personnel, though not frontliners, are a crucial part of the mall's team. They keep the indispensable mall air-conditioning at optimally cool temperatures, see to lifts and escalators and ensure lighting and other equipment are in good running condition.

Other key operations personnel take care of housekeeping tasks like waste disposal, washroom cleaning and maintenance, landscaping, car parks and

a host of other facilities.

A vital component of the operations team focuses on mall security and safety, which includes security patrols, fire safety and traffic management.

Administrative personnel are no less important as they are key to ensuring tenancy and billing documents are in order. They also collect rental and other dues on a timely basis so financial processes will be optimal.

They are essential to human resource functions, seeing to the well-being of employees as well as managing any litigation as and when applicable.

Each department head reports to a central manager or general manager who sets mall direction with the agreement of the mall owner.

There is no education programme through which to learn about managing shopping malls in Malaysia, though our first shopping complex opened in the 1970s and managing one was largely on-the-job training for many years.

Those who come from this school of hard knocks are hugely experienced and form a core group of mall managers which set up an association to handle common issues.

The association's role has evolved and, since 2002, now offers biannual training courses for mall employees to boost industry performance.

As living examples are the best way of information-sharing and learning, these sessions are conducted by hands-on practitioners.

#### Experienced personnel

With the growing property market, more and more malls are being developed, particularly in the last five years, with more under construction.

There is therefore a lack of experienced personnel to join mall management teams, so the industry needs all hands on deck to make the malls rock. With so many malls, competition will be intense, so working in a mall will be stimulating.

Anyone interested in joining the mall industry should remember it is an exciting and rewarding career – it gives job satisfaction and fulfilment like no other because malls allow us to connect with the desires of thousands of people, every day.

This is why we have been passionate about malls for the past 40 years. **FocusM**

**Evelyn Lo** is executive director of the Malaysian Association for Shopping and Highrise Complex Management (PPK)

Anwar Faiz Ahmad Tajudin/FocusM



JONATHAN LOI/FocusM



SHARIL AMIN ABDUL RAHIM/FocusM



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