

Technology driving the future of mall management

Pairing correct software with users helps harness impact on management efficiency and effectiveness



**Guest
writer**

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THE internet and its unlimited software development, applications and cloud storage technology have provided new options to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of shopping mall management.

Today, the basic departments which make up an organisation chart of a shopping mall include the finance, administration, IT (information technology), legal, human resource, maintenance, leasing and marketing, car park, security and safety.

In some shopping malls, certain departments are named differently or may be subsumed into another department or sub-department.

Older management infrastructure relied on the physical attributes of the shopping mall and personnel or people who manage it.

Evolving with technology

Face-to-face communications and negotiations evolved into telephone calls, faxes and social meetings. Now, all one needs is an Internet connection and a smart device.

With the internet here to stay, many property managers and owners have adopted them in various degrees.

Modern software refers to the people and artificial intelligence of communication technology. Shopping mall managers must not only adapt and adopt the new normal of software applications but embrace them wholeheartedly.

Hence, connectivity and communications play a huge part to make shopping mall management more efficient and effective.

Cloud-based software helps eliminate the need for excessive hardware and improves the risk factor related to data loss. Storage in the digital space provides possible differing levels of security encryption for those who wish to vary access.

In finance, administration and human resources, the use of relevant software contributes to more efficient management. It's the same for procurement, which can now be done remotely with encryption and e-bidding.

Leasing software is also available and utilises the cloud environment to better manage activities such as accessing historical data, space details and rental budgets with just a few clicks on a smart device.

This helps the leasing team as deals can then be done anytime, depending on discretionary limits.

The team is also freed from lugging around paperwork and various forms, brochures and physical documentation, thus reducing the risk of loss and damage.

Software companies like Yardi Systems Inc, MRI Software LLC and IFCA Consulting Group are being used by progressive shopping mall managers for such purposes.

Marketing a shopping mall involves two-way connection between the shopping mall manager and the mall's customers and guests.

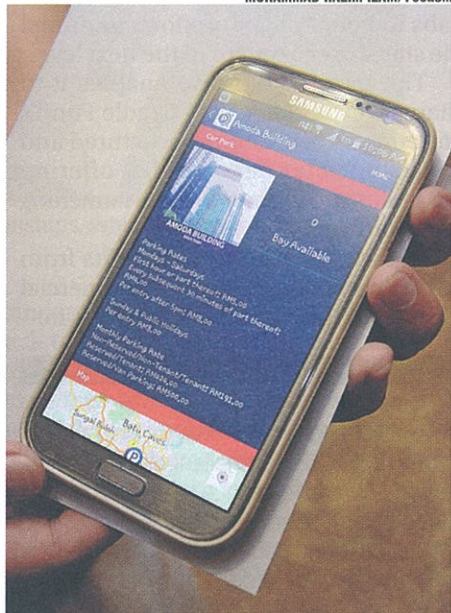
Monitoring software

Social media has become an important tool, so any previous disconnection with customers and guests cannot be excused today.

Shopping mall patrons are technology-savvy in varying degrees. Having electronic information boards or standalone iPad or touch screen stations have become the norm.

The creation of apps to further connect with customers and guests – from parking to entering, shopping and exiting the mall are expected in future.

MUHAMMAD HAZIM IZAM/FocusM



New technology like mobile phone application ParkAide may assist in finding vacant bays in carparks



Robots like Ray, developed by Serva Transport Systems, may one day park vehicles for shoppers



Malaysia has yet to adopt automated multi-level parking but it is a possibility in the future

Maintenance teams can also utilise the Internet of Things (IoT) to better manage all their outsourced contracts and preventive maintenance schedules.

(IoT is the network of physical objects – devices, vehicles, buildings and other items embedded with electronics, software, sensors and network connectivity – that enables these objects to collect and exchange data.)

Software and automation can help calibrate desired outcomes. Combined with skilled managers, this would improve the return on asset investment.

Car park management also changes with software and technology. Apps are being tested for automated traffic guidance to vacant parking bays.

This is an improvement from just the visual directions provided by the green and red lights we see in many shopping malls.

Trials are also being made for car park bay reservations. In overseas carparks, even robots are employed to park vehicles, besides utilising automated multi-level carparks.

Licence plate recognition technology is also being tested and likely to be used not only for security and safety, but also for car park management.

The use of auto pay machines will become obsolete as shopping malls use of alternative payment methods via direct debits or credit.

A cash-less option is imminent. This is compounded by the fact that most tolled roads will accept payment via only the Touch 'n Go card or SmartTag.

Many car parks in shopping malls also have the ticketing and Touch 'n Go options, and will readily speed up the complete conversion to a full Touch 'n Go system.

Security and safety have also been improved with the IoT as monitoring systems and recordings are done with cloud technology which has vastly improved its data safety.

Pedestrian counting systems have evolved into the use of camera-based systems. Again, data are stored in the cloud with customised user restrictions for retrieval.

Experian is a company that has installed footfall systems in many shopping malls in the country and Singapore.

Shared services would be the new normal of management where contracts and the ability to connect tenants and customers with their needs improves efficiency and effectiveness.

Obstacle to adoption

The biggest hurdle for most shopping mall managers is the decision to invest in technology.

Shopping mall owners and managers must be mindful that technology, like time, waits for no one.

They must embrace the notion that technology will become the lifeblood along with the sinews of key and skilled personnel, to create the connected delivery of needs through the Internet.

By pairing correct software with people who use it, shopping malls can harness the huge impact made on the efficiency and effectiveness of management.

The time to start is now. What was accepted previously is becoming obsolete. This is the dawn of the new normal of technology. **FocusM**

Anthony Dylan is the assistant treasurer of The Association for Shopping Complex and High-rise Management (PPK) Malaysia