



How many mall operators take the washroom into consideration when ensuring customer satisfaction?

# Shopping malls: The washroom experience

Many shopping mall management teams would speak about how they would like to exceed expectations of their guests and shoppers.

These would include the buzz words over the past three years - omni-channels, e-commerce, bricks and mortar, click and collect and experiential - when trying to grasp the needs of the discerning market which is evolving below the surface.

There is a change in attitude towards shopping malls by retailers, suppliers and contractors who seek a partnership and also by those making the purchases.

We have seen how disruptors made the unthinkable possible. Market research and data seem to be ever relevant as many start scrambling to figure how the shopper behaves and thinks in the lead-up to a purchase.

The fear of not getting car park space seems to have a solution in e-hailing applications like Grab. All we need now is another to challenge Grab. If that is not enough, GoCar and SoCar make another entry in providing one with an alternative to cumbersome vehicle rentals.

The shopping mall industry is changing so fast that shoppers now hold the most power in their hands with the aid of smart devices.

But, one of the most neglected aspects of a shopping mall other than the first impression of a car park and main entrance is the washroom facility.

It seems that some shopping malls have taken heed to improve the car park experience by ensuring the lightings go up to 150 lux at the minimum on driveways and 250 lux at intersections and pathways to the lobby. (Lux is the unit of illuminance and luminous emittance derived from the International System of Units or SI.)

The lobby in itself would be no less than 300 lux. Epoxy is also used to further protect the car park flooring from oil and acid which would also improve the overall ambience from a dull one to a cheery one.

Washrooms in general have always been something which should be taken seriously.

It is common knowledge that washrooms would likely be the first and last requirement upon reaching and leaving the

- **One of the most neglected aspects of a shopping mall other than the car park and main entrance is the washroom**

- **It is important that washrooms are also provided for the physically challenged**



by Anthony Dylan

**Many forget that the male washroom would also have urinals. when the 1:2 toilet cubicle ratio for male and female comes in question**

car or any other vehicle.

It also sets the shopping mall apart in the mindsets of discerning shoppers.

The general observation is that based on ratio, it seems the cubicles for males to females are about 1:2. This could be a problem as if you have say, only two male cubicles, it would mean that the female would have only four cubicles. Many would tend to forget that the male washroom would also have urinals.

This has to be rethought as it is essential to understand the user journey of both genders to fully understand the logic behind the ratio.

There must be a proper analysis of distance between one toilet location to the other on a shopping mall floor plate. It is also important to ensure that the number of cubicles allocated for male and female facilities at each location is sufficient.

## Importance of design

Designing a washroom for a shopping mall should take an important role in creating a better experience for the users. It should steer away from going for looks and ignoring the function. Those in operations and those who actually maintain these washrooms should be given priority in providing input. It is a fact that designing a robust yet functional and clean washroom should be a priority. Yet, it is easier said than done.

It has been proven before that the most important thought criteria for designing a good washroom facility are as follows:

1. Location of washroom or toilet hubs on a floor plate

2. Number of cubicles for male and female based on a 1: 2 ratio. Personally I would prefer a 1:3
3. Service corridor for sanitary and plumbing/flushing systems
4. Barrier free and touch free for every person, be they young, elderly or physically challenged
5. Humidity and air-conditioning
6. Exhaust
7. Lighting
8. Floor design and use of technology and robust materials

As mentioned earlier, deciding on the location would allow you to decide on the number of cubicles for male and female facilities. It is also important to note that with this layout, each facility must include a physically challenged toilet. This must be automated. You cannot expect a physically challenged person to wait for a door to be opened or to pull a door close and open.

The placement of a service corridor behind cubicles can save you a lot of impending issues with pipes and sensor repairs, maintenance and replacement. This can allow personnel to work at an area causing the least disturbance to the pristine washroom; this is normally spaced at about 3ft but it would be better if it could go up to 4ft. This could also allow a toilet cubicle for both male and female to be arranged as a back-to-back to save space. The creation of a main sanitary system can be limited to the same area as a stack.

It is also important that touch is limited or at best, eliminated. Imagine going into a cubicle, the first and last thing you touch is the cubicle door. However, within the cubicle, it should ideally be a fully sensor-type flush system.

There should no longer be a manual system to pull a lever or push a button. There should also not be doors any more when entering a toilet.

It should be barrier free and to use the principles of physics to ensure the air-conditioning and exhaust work in tandem. It is a proven fact that the toilet temperature kept at 24 degrees Celsius would help greatly with the suppression of odour.

An exhaust would work well in each cubicle if the cubicle is covered from floor to ceiling at the interparty partition as it would be aerated from the gap at the door and the exhaust.

## Make it bright with at least 250 lux

It is also important to have a good lux lighting level. There have been successful designs where the lux levels are at 300 lux. However, 250 lux should be the minimum.

The floor should also be designed to have enough slope to fall towards the created water drainage. This would aid in full cleaning and normally a scupper drain placed just after the cubicle door upon entering would aid in cleanliness.

Sensor taps and sensor foam dispensers along with the provision of HEPA hand blowers would help. It is important to invest in these. Those with toilet seats would be provided with seat bidets, the same goes with squat pans. The use of hand-held bidets would just waste water and make the space overly wet. The provision of sanitary wipes and sanitary bins are a must.

Robust materials should also be used for basins and tops. The use of fancy materials like solid surface would not stand the test of time and abuse. It would better to think of a harder material to withstand scratches and breakage.

Having a toilet designed with functionality in mind would make both those maintaining and those using them appreciate the effort a shopping mall makes. This is a way to make a difference in understanding the needs of users. **FocusM**

*Anthony Dylan is a member of the Shopping Mall Association (PPK) Malaysia*

