Bridging Digital and Traditional Shopping Experiences
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The rapid growth of online retailing has become a significant threat for brick-and-mortar retailers as time constrained and tech-savvy consumers seek greater depth of product choice and availability, along with the convenience of ordering online.

This growing trend toward digital retail puts both shopping malls and retail real estate investment trusts (REITs) under enormous pressure to improve foot traffic and increase sales for their retailers.

As retail evolves, embracing an omni-channel approach is no longer a nice to have. Shopping malls need to find a way to assist their retail partners in creating relevant, personalized and engaging shopping experiences. When shoppers do enter physical locations, they increasingly expect to walk into experiences, not stores.

To succeed, shopping malls must look at the changing times as an opportunity to leverage technology to improve customer experience and engagement. To become a destination that delivers an immersive and intuitive experience.
There is no shortage of research conducted on consumer preferences and behaviors, particularly in the retail vertical. Studies show that despite the prominence of digital living, consumers from all demographics still value a physical shopping experience – especially ones that effectively bridge the physical and digital divide in retail.

Shopping mall owners and retailers have begun experimenting with mobile applications in an attempt to create an enhanced and more engaging shopping experience. These early version apps typically offer little more than static maps, store directories and non-contextual promotions and were not as successful as malls and REITs had hoped they would be.

**SHOPPING MALL APP SUCCESS FACTORS**

When approached correctly, shopping mall apps have the power to enhance a shopper’s path to purchase and positively affect incremental visits and spend at shopping mall properties.

For a shopping mall app to be effective, there are certain criteria and elements that must be present to deliver an exceptional experience. These apps must:

1. Create location awareness by integrating indoor maps
2. Connect with various disparate third-party data sources
3. Be easily manageable across a global portfolio of shopping mall properties
4. Be able to scale to meet ever evolving business needs
When these elements and factors are combined, shopping malls and REITs can easily deliver accurate and relevant real-time information to consumers resulting in an immersive and engaging experience.

**Location Awareness**

A solid location infrastructure and addressable indoor maps are the key foundational layers to the success of a shopping mall app. Indoor mapping and location technologies take complex spatial data and give it meaning – they help to create location awareness.

For shoppers, map-enabled applications help to enhance their experience by highlighting where they are and guiding them to stores and other points of interest with turn-by-turn navigation. From the perspective of a shopping mall or REIT, indoor maps help to provide valuable location data, including visibility into a shopper’s journey, path patterns and other relevant business insights that help them make smarter, more informed decisions.

>> *Indoor mapping and location technologies take spatial data and give it context*

**Integrating Disparate Data Sources**

While shoppers appreciate the wider selection and abundance of product information available when shopping online, there is still enjoyment derived from an in-store experience. Consumers want the ability to touch, see, feel, try out and immediately walk away with a product – tactile experiences which are lacking from the online shopping experience. A
retailer’s inability to create a shopping experience where online and offline intersect comes with a high price tag – their success. This is unfortunately where most retailers fall short in meeting the blended needs of consumers who increasingly expect highly engaging, personalized shipping experiences.

The ability to integrate your shopping mall app with current and future data sources – databases of retailers, parking systems, cinemas, and other third-party data streams – is key to bridging the gap between digital and physical shopping experiences.

This can be as simple as expanding a traditional store directory to include advanced search criteria such as product type, category and deals, or as extensive as integrating with outdoor mapping technologies and parking services to guide people from their home to an available parking spot nearest the most efficient mall entrance, and right to their desired destination inside the mall. Shoppers can even be given the option to reserve a parking spot while on-route, a potential additional revenue source or loyalty benefit similar to that of the airline industry. Regardless of the quantity and complexity of integrations, connecting disparate systems significantly improves a visitor’s experience and path to purchase.

Maintaining Accurate Indoor Maps

Architectural diagrams quickly become outdated as lease plans change and tenants move. The ability to easily maintain accurate and up-to-date digital maps is a crucial requirement for creating a relevant and enjoyable indoor navigation experience, particularly when incorporating blue dot technology.
Digitized maps are the first step towards making indoor spaces addressable and having a centralized system to manage maps across a global portfolio of properties is key to creating and maintaining a successful location aware shopping mall app. With a comprehensive content management system (CMS), shopping malls are able to be the digital landlord of their space and have a single source of truth where map files are in the same format enterprise-wide and are stored in a single system. Administrators can quickly and easily modify, add data onto, and extract maps to share as desired with digitized maps.

Think about the complexities of managing maps for a retail real estate company with a portfolio of 100 malls, each with multiple stories. This would translate to more than 200 maps, not to mention the associated map data and objects such as stores, amenities, path types, and other transient elements that need to be managed. Having a centralized CMS gives shopping mall and REIT administrators the ability to easily manage maps manually or to optionally leverage integrations to configure business rules that trigger automatic map updates. When a tenant moves or lease plans change, updates to store locations can happen automatically. Changes can be applied selectively across geographically dispersed properties and distribution channels such as mobile, web and kiosks.
Future Proof Technology

As mobile becomes a more integral part of your competitive advantage, the ability to evolve your app in unison with advancements in technology will become critical to your success.

Mobile and location-aware technologies are continuously evolving. For a shopping mall app to be successful, it is imperative that it be built on a scalable platform capable of adapting to new technologies, distribution channels, and use cases. It should be built on an open architecture that accounts for the rapid evolution of IoT and indoor location technologies. With a scalable platform, shopping malls and REITs can rest assured that regardless of future technology shifts, their shopping mall apps can easily be extended to support future use cases and be compatible with custom functionality not native to the core platform through integrations.

Shopping malls will increasingly turn to innovative technologies to help them better understand consumer preferences and to ensure that their mobile applications aid in delivering a true omni-channel experience.
THE PATH TO SUCCESS

When it comes to building a location aware shopping mall application, there are two types of solutions – turnkey point solutions and platforms.

Taking a cookie-cutter approach will likely disappoint shoppers offering only shallow features and will prove difficult to scale over time. To create real value for both shoppers and shopping mall owners, it is best to leverage a platform that is open and agnostic, future-proofing your investment. An ideal platform solution gives your development team the ability to easily customize and evolve your shopping mall app, using a feature-rich platform that integrates with your existing core systems. Here is an overview of the essential features your app should include.

Advanced Map Display and Interaction

App developers need the ability to include features like 360 degree map rotation, pan and zoom, multiple floor views, extended map views showing surrounding streets and cartography, customizable styling, and the ability control who sees what from a single system with a single set of maps. These features deliver a more contextual and user-friendly experience for shoppers.

Content Management

Having the ability to manage content and map data across multiple properties through a single application significantly reduces the support overhead associated with managing and deploying an app across multiple properties. For geographically dispersed locations, this makes it easier for administrators to localize map updates, promotions and communications by country, state,
or city. With a powerful CMS, shopping malls and REITs can create tailored solutions while having centralized management of all associated data.

**Turn-By-Turn Navigation**

Give your shoppers the ability to see the location of stores, destinations and other points of interest on a digital map of your shopping center. This empowers people to see where they are, identify where they are going and plan their route between stores and navigate to their destination using landmark based turn-by-turn directions. When integrated with indoor positioning technology, people can even locate their own position, as a blue dot, as they move within your shopping mall.

**Messaging Technologies**

Contextual messaging is a great tool that helps you deliver the right message to the right person at the right time. Hyper-relevant messaging keeps shoppers engaged in an app by providing useful information about shopping center events and retail promotions. When using an indoor mapping and location platform that supports integrations with external systems, shopping centers can integrate with loyalty and rewards programs, gaining accessing to more detailed shopper profiles which helps deliver a more relevant, engaging and delightful shopping experience for visitors. This, combined with location aware technologies, means the most relevant communications can be delivered to shoppers based on their location, preferences and other business rules.
**Personalized Maps**

Consumers now expect hyper-personalized experiences. True personalization goes beyond delivering customized content, products and promotions based on shopper’s preferences and behaviors. Shopping malls and REITs can also personalize their map views and cater to different users by serving customized visualizations of their space based on a user's profile - all while only having to manage a single map instance. Parts of a map can be restricted, and multiple wayfinding paths can be presented based on the type of user.

Shoppers can be served a basic map showing stores, amenities, parking lots and other relevant areas, while retailers might be able to see everything available to shoppers plus additional areas such as loading docks and other more detailed information, and mall owners can see all map elements including HVAC and lighting systems and all available data. Technology advancements help put shopping mall owners in charge of their space and how it is presented to different shopping mall app users.

**Insights and Location Analytics**

Mobile apps aren't just powerful tools for improving shopper engagement, they provide unparalleled insight into shopper's behaviors. While shopper traffic has been cited as one of the key influencers in mall performance, there is little real data available on mall foot traffic...
data. The combination of location-aware objects and mobile apps can help to collect valuable intelligence on traffic patterns in shopping malls and provide relevant insights about shoppers. With access to this business intelligence data, shopping malls and REITs can further enhance the shopper experience, motivate spending, maximize traffic flows and optimize space utilization.

Smart Search

Advanced search features provide shoppers with the ability to find what they need in fewer steps. Intelligent search by keyword, predictive search based on user history, and suggestion functions all remove points of friction from the shopping experience and mitigate frustration from shoppers who know what they are looking for.
Shopping malls have been the epicenter of shopping activity since the 1950s, and they will continue to play a pivotal role for consumers, retailers and investors.

Instead of being treated as a threat, online shopping should be embraced as a way to achieve a truly unified cross-channel shopping experience. Creative property owners will harness the power of location-awareness and the Internet of Things to evolve mobile shopping apps beyond store directories by integrating core systems to create a more holistic omni-channel experience that begins at home and covers a customer’s entire journey.

To learn more about how you can leverage indoor mapping and location technology to quickly deploy customizable mobile applications that engage and delight shoppers throughout their digital and physical shopping experience, contact Jibestream today.
Let's talk about your goals

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About Jibestream

Jibestream is an award-winning software company that specializes in merging the location dimension into enterprise solutions for real-time visual intelligence.

Jibestream’s premier indoor mapping and location platform gives developers the tools to integrate business data with indoor maps to create tailored map-enabled web and mobile applications.

Every day, organizations rely on Jibestream to power their indoor maps creating an enriched experience of place.