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Re-energizing retail and restaurant space adds to owner's bottom line

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We've all seen them....those lifeless retail spaces and vacant storefronts.

Built to anchor urban office buildings and attract commercial tenants, they sit today quietly consigned to drag down asset performance and downgrade the properties' image. These neglected spaces represent a missed opportunity to energize a property with a vibrant ground floor public space.

What can be done to reposition these retail and restaurant spaces? A fresh new approach is often needed, one that requires both business insight and creative design to convert the underperforming properties to profitable enterprises. Implementing the right approach means attracting the best tenants and their customers.

Retail spaces at the base of an office building or as part of a mixed use development are the first thing one sees approaching the site. Potential customers need to perceive the stores as an inviting opportunity to browse and to buy. Even more important, customers need to perceive the stores as an inviting opportunity to browse and to buy.

We achieve this "invitation" on the outside by creatively activating

store windows, lighting, and signage in a way that pleases the eye. By letting customers see on the outside what is inside, their decision to enter the retail space is made easier. The most successful stores translate this message with large, well-lit store windows that call attention to eye-catching displays and bold signage that differentiates the retailer.

At *Tower Square* in Springfield Mass., we were asked to inject retail life into a 25-story office tower with an existing 200,000 s/f base of retail. The shops were originally built facing inward, away from the street, like a typical mall. We reconfigured the first two levels of the building, moving the tower's mid-block entry point to the busiest, most visible street corner.

What had previously been a blank parking garage façade was transformed by creating a colorful multi-story glass and neon icon to welcome customers and face the city. By orienting new entrances for pedestrians and installing new floor-to-ceiling windows, the retail space became transparent, inviting customers inside.

The elements outside the storefronts should ideally be used to "frame" the retail space in an appealing and unique way, and add scale to the urban street experience. Simple additions such as awnings or carefully crafted signs are like "jewelry" adding color and texture to a flat, neutral building facade. Used wisely to enhance the brand of the retailers, outdoor furniture, table umbrel-

las, kiosks, and landscaping add to the appeal of dining and retail spaces.

At Boston's 600,000 s/f office complex *Center Plaza*, a strong signage program and other exterior improvements were added along the curved concourse of retail shops on Cambridge St. This downtown stretch suffered from not only a lack of customer interest, but from a lack of color, image and neighborhood identity. New color panels and merchant signage were added to enliven tired storefronts, and new kiosks and newsstand pavilions were built into empty spaces to add life to the major public access through the building.

Finally, the key to pulling the public space together rests with a consistent branding and graphics program. Spearheaded by the success of festival marketplaces like Boston's *Faneuil Hall Marketplace* and New York's *South Street Seaport*, and now a key part of many retail development such as Cambridge Galleria, innovative use of environmental graphics not only helps guide shoppers, it creates a mood and sense of place — a destination.

Customers expect store interiors to be contemporary, lively and visually engaging. Retailers neglecting to upgrade and refresh store interiors run the risk of obsolescence. But improvements don't have to break the bank.

Flooring and lighting present the biggest opportunities for visual improvement. New flooring can transform the entire look and feel of a retail store, and owners today have lots of price and materials options for commercial floors.

A modest investment in interior lighting can provide a significant return: guiding customers to featured merchandise and shaping the interior experience with decorative or concealed lighting.

With any repositioning program, the costs can be scaled to meet the objectives and budget of the owner. Graphics, creative displays and lighting upgrades can achieve high impact, versus a more costly 'bricks and sticks' approach.

With heated competition for top tier commercial tenants likely to continue, boosting customer appeal at the front door just makes economic sense. An improved first impression will have an immediate, measurable impact on attracting and keeping the right tenant mix for the entire property.

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PARAMUS PARK
SHOPPING CENTER

Location:
Paramus, New Jersey

Program:
Reposition existing
center in competitive market.
50,000 SF expansion,
280,000 SF common area
renovation; \$25.1 million
construction cost

Client:
The Rouse Company

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