Shopping Center Branding: Does it Make Sense?

by Mark G. Gambill

Introduction

A rancher was asked the name of his ranch. He replied, "It's the ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ Ranch." He was then asked how many head of cattle he had and he said, "Not many." "Why not," the rancher was asked. The rancher said, "Because most of them do not survive the branding."

Branding is a complex topic in the world of marketing. Many marketing theorists and researchers hold that branding correctly done can be the key to the success of a company, product or service. While some companies should utilize branding, it is not always a practical solution in every case and does not lend itself to every application. Many companies that try to brand either themselves or their products or services do not do it correctly and, as a result, do not survive the process.

This manuscript will focus on the efforts of retail real estate companies to brand themselves. The process of branding will be explored; why real estate companies feel compelled to brand; and how real estate companies brand themselves.

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What is a Brand?

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design or a combination of these intended to identify the products or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.[1] A brand is a seller's promise to consistently deliver a specific set of features, benefits and services to buyers.[2]

The art of naming a brand, *i.e.*, a company, the products they manufacture, or the services they provide, is called semonemics. This is a word derived from the Greek – *semon* (identifier) and *semein* (to assign).

Branding is the creation of a connection of that name to the company, product, or service.

Charmasson[3] indicates that, "A name is a goodwill ambassador, a herald, a promise, the first thing that a consumer hears about a firm or its product. That first contact often determines the consumer's attitude toward the firm or product that the name identifies." [4]

According to Professor John Philip Jones of Syracuse University, a brand is a product that provides functional benefits plus added elements that some consumers value enough to buy.[5] The difference between a name and a brand is that while a name is an identifying designation, the brand name adds to that a sense of definition and personality.[6]

Murphy[7] states that a brand is the product or service of a particular supplier, which is differentiated by its name and presentation. He says that a brand is a complex thing. Not only is it the actual product, but it is also the unique property of a specific owner and developed over time so as to embrace a set of values, both tangible and intangible, which meaningfully and appropriately differentiate products which are otherwise very similar.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BRANDING

A brand exists in psychological space, in the consumer's mind, according to Randazzo.[8] He indicates that a brand is dynamic and malleable. Randazzo says that advertising is the vehicle that allows access to the consumer's mind, wherein a perceptual brand space is established. A brand takes on an almost mythical quality in the mind of the consumer, where the brand serves to engage the very psyche of the individual.

Gregory[9] states that corporate image is comprised of "familiarity" – how well relevant audiences know the company - and "favorability" – how well audiences regard the company in terms of specific qualitative attributes. In the end, according to Gregory, the brand is the reputation and the reputation is the brand. Quoting Charles Brymer, CEO of Interbrand Scheter, Gregory posits that, "A product becomes a brand only when it stands for a host of tangible, intangible, and psychological factors. A key point to remember is that the manufacturer does not create brands. They exist only in the eye of the beholder; the customer."[10]

Gardner[11] indicates that marketers do not have the power to build a brand. The actual creation of a brand and brand identity is done in the minds of each individual consumer.

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The primary function of a brand is to identify and distinguish a firm from other firms or the firm's products or services from those of competitors. Psychologists call the impression left by a name an "engram."[12] This is the impact the name has on the mind independent of the designated person or object. Davidson[13] states that a brand is a constantly changing mental inventory inside the customer's mind. Every facet of the marketing mix influences its image.

Ries and Ries[14] state, "We believe in the process of branding. Marketing is building a brand in the mind of the prospect. If you can build a powerful brand, you will have a powerful marketing program. If you can't, then all the advertising, fancy packaging, sales promotion, and public relations in the world won't help you achieve your objective. Today, most products and services are bought, not sold. And, branding greatly facilitates this process. Branding "pre-sells" the product or service to the user. Branding is simply a more efficient way to sell things."[15] Ries and Ries indicate that a brand name is nothing more than a word in the mind, albeit a special kind of word.

WHY BRAND?

Branding has a dramatic effect on retail performance, according to *Chain Store Age*, a news magazine for retail executives, compiled by Arthur Andersen.[16] Creating a powerful brand appeal is paramount in today's overstored environment.[17] The successful retailer of the future will focus its brand building activities, both in-store and externally, on a select group of core target shoppers who appreciate and value the brand's attributes. *Chain Store Age* states that these "best customers" become the true basis of future growth. It has been a long-held belief in retail circles that Pareto's so-called

"Golden Ratio" applies, *i.e.*, that 80 percent of sales come from 20 percent of customers. It would appear that *Chain Store Age* is advocating that shopping center companies tap into the core of "best customers."

Even though relationship marketing has been criticized in certain circles, the essence of the concept is inherent in the branding process. Branding is an attempt by a marketer to form a bond or lasting relationship between that certain company, product or service and the consumer.

Fox indicates that a number of companies are beginning to experiment with corporate branding and the motives behind the campaigns vary widely, but all are symptomatic of a newfound enthusiasm for corporate chest beating.[18] Fox also states that because of external forces acting on companies from all sectors, the increasing difficulty of carving out a competitive edge and the cost of supporting single brands, corporate branding is a sensible marketing option.

Cebrzynski[19] states that of all the techniques available to marketers, branding is the most powerful. He says branding is intended to be a long-term commitment to building and nurturing a loyal customer. According to Cebrzynski, branding is often an emotional appeal, speaking to how consumers want to feel about themselves.

Marconi[20] states that price with quality equals value and value is why people choose one brand over another. That, he says, and that "feel good" quality. Image, according to Marconi, is a major factor in the buying decision and sometimes it has to do with not only the image to which one aspires, but to one that is sort of a "creed."[21]

Lindquist[22] quotes Martineau[23] talking about store image, "It is the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes. " Lindquist also states that the brand image consists of everything people associate with the brand. He says that the word "store" could easily be substituted for the word "brand." It could be further argued, in the context of this manuscript, that "shopping center" could also be substituted for the word "brand" to capsulize the efforts of shopping center companies to brand themselves.

Nilson[24] states that the role of a brand is to trigger a set of 'stored' values in the minds of customers. Brands are developed to tap into the customers' ability to retain impressions and link them to a visual or oral expression. According to Nilson, brands are built out of key values. These values are tangible benefits and intangible character.

Murphy[25] indicates that brands are important to brand owners at two different levels. Brands serve to focus consumer loyalties and they develop as assets, which ensure future demand and cash flows. The brand, Murphy says, also serves to capture the promotional investment which has been placed behind it; benefits that can accrue even years later.

According to Upshaw,[26] brands have become "the atomic core of our consumer-driven capitalistic economy." He goes on to say that, "A brand is an assortment of expectations established by the seller that, once fulfilled, forms a covenant with the buyer."[27] Upshaw states, "Creating and sustaining trust within a franchise requires the matching of what is expected with actual performance. A formidable brand identity is the end product of that process."[28]

Brands are part of a strategy aimed at differentiating supply.[29] According to Kapferer, companies seek to better fulfill the expectations of specific groups of customers. He says that the company wants to leave its mark on a given field and its imprint on a product.

Kapferer also states that "the spirit of a brand can only be inferred through its product and its advertising. The content of a brand grows out of the cumulative memory of these acts, provided they are governed by a unifying idea or guideline."[30] He says that the brand tells why products exist, where they come from and where they are going. By creating satisfaction and loyalty, the brand enters into a virtual contract binding it to the market. In exchange, the brand earns an automatically favorable opinion of any new products it introduces.[31]

Dr. Richard Tedlow, professor at Harvard Business School and a branding researcher, explains branding as a "promise of reliability."[32] He says, "branding is in some sense a promise and brand equity, brand value, comes from the keeping of that promise. Generally speaking, branding is about reassurance, about consistency, about loyalty, about repurchase behavior."[33] Tedlow is creating a case study based upon the Westfield branding efforts.[34]

BUILDING A BRAND TODAY

It used to take years to build a brand. A company like Proctor & Gamble or General Electric would make quality products and over time, consumers would come to associate that quality with the company name. When they went to stores, these consumers would look for and purchase the given products because certain companies made them. The company itself became a brand name and the products they made became brands as well. Marconi[35] says that marketers spent years creating brand identification and recognition and building brand loyalty.

Today, society has instant everything. Faxes and Fed-Ex'ing of packages are the norm instead of the exception. Microwave ovens cook, in minutes, foods that used to take hours. Computers now do, in seconds, computations and tasks that used to take hours or even days.

The same is true with branding. The efforts of systematic brand building have been overshadowed by instant brand building in the twentieth century. Technology and technologists with their "laser-like vision" have created a world of instant branding.[36]

According to Marconi,[37] the power of instant branding reached new heights in the 1980s when Apple Computers and Nike spent virtually their entire advertising budget to run one-minute commercials during the Super Bowl. Randazzo[38] indicates that to build a brand is to create a mythology. The key to building a strong, enduring brand mythology is advertising. Advertising provides a powerful vehicle to create an appropriate perceptual inventory of imagery, associations, and feeling for a brand.

Ries and Ries[39] state, "Marketing is branding. The two concepts are so inextricably linked that it is impossible to separate them. Furthermore, since everything a company does can contribute to the brand building process, marketing is not a function that can be considered in isolation. Marketing is what a company is in business to do."[40]

In her book, *Warp Speed Branding: The Impact of Technology on Branding*, Winkler[41] states that brand building in the technology world has grown up with an entirely different set of assumptions stemming from the very nature of innovation. Winkler says that the need for speed has changed how the business environments, processes, and consumers perceive products, services, and their respective roles.

According to Winkler, there are six myths of branding that until recently were held as immutable. They are as follows:

Myth 1. A brand is built over a long time. Communication technologies and computers have created a branding environment that can be measured in nanoseconds.

Myth 2. A brand is precisely crafted for a tightly defined target. A brand must be more expansive, according to Winkler, because of a more complicated group of stakeholder relationships and a more splintered society.

Myth 3. Advertising is the major creator of a brand. Techno-hype creates more of a "buzz" about a product or service, in a shorter period of time, than any traditional advertising medium.

Myth 4. Brand the product. Today, says Winkler, the idea behind the product or service is what companies need to brand rather than the product or service itself.

Myth 5. The brand needs a manager. With so many factors out of a traditional brand manager's control, if there is a person charged with brand oversight, that person could better be called a brand "Shepherd," rather than a manager, according to Winkler.

Myth 6. The brand is a marketing concept. Brands have financial significance and are larger assets than can be simply thought of or handled as marketing commodities.

Gregory[42] indicates that there are seven generally accepted essential characteristics of any successful corporate branding program:

1. Simplicity – Try not to be all things to all people; focus on the important.
2. Uniqueness – Set yourself apart from the crowd.
3. Appropriateness – Bring attention to the qualities that further corporate objectives, not just the company.
4. Relevance – Hit home with target audiences.
5. Foresight – Create a positive impression before negative opinions can be formed.

6. Continuity – High visibility for the long term.
7. Credibility – Message must match reality.[43]

The aim of branding is to create a marketing asset that has power in the marketplace; to achieve brand equity. According to Kotler and Armstrong,[44] brand equity is the value of a brand, based on the extent to which it has high loyalty among consumers, name awareness, perceived quality, strong associations with other brands, and worth as intangible or intellectual property.

Marconi[45] agrees with that definition and indicates that establishing that value begins with creating awareness. There are two ways to do this, according to Marconi: quickly or slowly. The slow process, argues Marconi, is more likely to achieve lasting results and is done through test marketing, sampling, advertising, sponsorships, promotions, public relations, event or cause participation, and endorsements. The quick way to achieve awareness is to do all of the above, but faster. According to Marconi, this occurs through hype.

Docters[46] indicates that brand equity produces the highest return when customers lack specific information for evaluating a purchase; do not have clear standards for evaluating the information they do have; either cannot or will not seek out more information; or just do not have the time to do so. He says that, "brand plays an especially powerful role in markets characterized by a high degree of uncertainty or mystery. In such markets, sheer belief or trust on the part of consumers can outweigh nearly all other considerations."[47]

WHAT ARE SHOPPING CENTER COMPANIES SEEKING TO ESTABLISH IN THE CONSUMER'S MIND?

In mall branding, shopping center companies are trying to establish themselves in the mind of the consumer as the purveyor of THE mall or power center experience. The theory is that if the shopping center company can become the customer's brand, it will become the shopping locale of choice for that consumer. The ultimate goal of shopping center branding is that the mall company name takes on a life of its own in the consumer's mind.

Chain Store Age,[48] in its "State of the Industry" issue, states, "Most any retailer today can duplicate any other's store design, product mix, advertising, promotions, pricing, or customer-service strategy. However, what's not easily replicated is the unique *combination* of these and other attributes which

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become compelling enough in the minds of target customers to create an almost cult-like following enjoyed by such chains as Nieman-Marcus, Abercrombie & Fitch, Home Depot, Whole Foods Market, and FAO Schwartz."

The reality is that shopping center companies would like to do the very same thing through branding. They want to create a "cult-like following" to their centers. If that can occur, shopping center companies will have accomplished, through branding, something that they might not have otherwise achieved: customer loyalty.

Chain Store Age[49] goes on to state that "branding has a dramatic effect on retail performance, which is why creating powerful brand appeal is paramount in today's overstored environment.

Tedlow[50] states, "Most American malls will probably be branded within the next three years. A name brand offers value to be created and captured."[51] John Konnarski, senior vice president of the International Council of Shopping Centers, says, "American consumers are more brand-oriented than ever. You have to differentiate yourself. And consumers use the mall as a point of reference as to where they shop. They used to say, 'I'm going to Bloomingdale's or Macy's. Now they reference the mall. Branding has a strong potential to become a real success for mall developers."[52]

A corporation has values, beliefs, rituals, aspirations, a personality, a reputation – a brand.[53] According to Gregory, corporate branding is a

purposeful, marketing-oriented communications platform across all business units, product and service brands, media, and audiences. The sum is more than the whole of the parts.[54]

Shopping center companies want to establish themselves as the brand in the mind of the consumer. They are attempting to tap into the psychological core of the consumer with criteria that the consumer values in a shopping center or experience. Shopping center companies are making promises to the consumer. According to Gregory,[55] a brand is not an icon, a slogan, or a mission statement. "It is a promise – a promise your company can keep."[56] He says what a brand communicates is the subtext – "You can believe in our company and our products."[57]

Williamson[58] indicates that name brand marketing means more than just a sign on the door. He cites executives at Simon and Westfield[59] that state that a shopping center brand has to equal more than a sum of its retailers. Simon is seeking the "power of being able to aggregate nationally."[60]

According to Management Horizons, PricewaterhouseCoopers' retail consulting group, department store purchases have declined, while traffic at discount department stores such as Target, Wal-Mart, and Kmart, and off-price retailers such as Marshall's, TJ Maxx, and Ross Dress For Less have made sizable gains.[61] The shift away from mall-based shopping, particularly at department stores, is even more pronounced when looking at male shoppers, according to Schneiderman,[62] again citing Management Horizons.

One issue for consideration is that shopping center companies do not have a product. They are somewhat marketing a service, but in reality, it is not exactly a service either. Shopping center companies are selling what Randazzo refers to as perception.[63]

Turley and Moore[64] state that the majority of interest in branding has been focused on physical forms or goods, rather than services. The intangibility factor associated with services has led to the opinion that branding and image creation may be even more critical for services.[65, 66]

Onkvisit and Shaw[67] state that a commodity is an undifferentiated product and a product is a value-added, differentiated commodity. They state that the distinction is not superficial and has significant managerial implications for service marketers.

Onkvisit and Shaw[68] indicate that whenever possible, a service provider should attempt to become a "power brander" by possessing four characteristics:

1. The company brand is distinctive.
2. The company brand is relevant.
3. The company brand has a tangible quality.
4. The company's most important services are branded and linked.

Even though shopping centers are physical entities, what the shopping centers are branding is intangible. The characteristics of a brand name such as "Simon," "Tanger," or "Mills" revolve more around the non-physical qualities of the given shopping experience than they do around the aspects of the physical plant of the shopping center. Zeithaml, Parasurman, and Berry[69] identified four unique features of services: 1). intangibility; 2). inseparability of production and consumption; 3). heterogeneity; and 4). perishability. All of these apply to what is being offered by shopping center companies as a product/service and is what these companies are attempting to brand.

De Chernatony and Riley[70] indicate that part of what is being sold with a service is the overall stature and imagery of the organization and consumers tend to perceive all services offered by a company as components of a single brand. They indicate that the extent of intangible elements in the functional benefit may affect the way the service brand is operationalized.[71]

The Internet is threatening the very existence of shopping centers. The bits and bytes of the cybermall are replacing the bricks and sticks of the regional mall. Consumers are turning to the Net as a simpler way to shop. There is a fear among mall companies that the local mall or power center could quickly become a catalog showroom as buyers survey the merchandise and then get online to get the best price and buy. In fact, one mall, The St. Louis Galleria, went so far as to prohibit its tenants from displaying any advertising containing references to Web sites,[72] but one week later, it revoked the prohibition.

Paco Underhill, author of *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping*,[73] contains significant observations about how customers act and what motivates them, indicates that the Internet is a valuable tool, but it will not replace the "bricks and mortar" of the local shopping center.[74] Technology, according to

Underhill, is a troubling issue, because as much as it facilitates, it also confuses. Underhill opines that the future of the Net for retailers is that it will become an integrated part of the shopping experience. "Just as I can use my store to drive traffic to the Net, I can use the Net to drive traffic to my stores," says Underhill.[75] The bottom line according to Underhill is that "we will always have stores." [76]

One thing that malls and community/power centers are selling is the environment. Shopping centers are seeking to make the experience more fun and attractive. If customers perceive that shopping is an enjoyable experience, they will want to return again and again. The local mall or community center needs to be seen by the customer as an entertainment environment.

Other associations that the retail real estate companies are trying to create in the consumer's mind are convenience, dependability, innovation, community-mindedness, good management, safety, selection, and value, among others. The thought is that if these companies can create a link in the customer's psyche between these factors and their shopping center, this will breed loyalty to the shopping center or, on a global scale, the shopping center company generally.

The goal of shopping center branding is to get consumers to invest themselves in the company and its shopping experience. According to Gregory, if all other things are equal, corporate branding can be the tiebreaker that motivates people to buy the corporation's products or services and recommend them to others.[77] In a chapter called, "Establishing the Key Message," Gregory,[78] indicates that quality is still the key branding message for many companies.

Ries and Ries[79] indicate that the brand is not just the name on the package or service. It is the product or service itself. What is delivered is the most important aspect of the branding process.

What shopping center companies are branding is their ability to consistently deliver a high-quality shopping experience. If they fail to do that, all they have is their company name on a shopping center or mall.

In a study on the correlation between consumer emotion and buying behavior, Babin and Darden[80] found that in-store mood influences customer satisfaction. Negative shopping moods affect patron satisfaction to a greater extent than positive moods. This is important from a shopping center company branding perspective, because these companies need to create an environment that influences customer mood in a positive way and, more importantly, eliminates stimuli that would lead to a negative mood on the part of the customer.

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SOME EXAMPLES OF SHOPPING CENTER BRANDING

Shopping center companies are taking different approaches to branding, but most are striving for name recognition and association of that name with a quality shopping experience. Connection or association to the particular shopping center company through branding is one significant way that loyalty of the consumer is achieved.

In an article entitled, "More Than a Name," *Chain Store Age*[81] states that although it sounds like a simple concept, branding by real estate developers signals a turning point in the industry. According to this article, developers are relying on intuitive visions and fundamental convictions to create loyal followings among retailers and consumers.

Chain Store Age[82] states that the origins of branding in retail development trace to the rise of "name-brand outlets" in the early 1980s. Tanger Factory Outlet Centers led the way with branded developments that included merchants like Nike, Liz Claiborne, Tommy Hilfiger, and Reebok. Four years ago, Tanger extended the branding concept beyond the use of a common name to include consistency in advertising and communications. Carrie Johnson-Warren, vice president of marketing for Tanger, states, "Consumers want simplicity; branding makes it so much easier to package our information in advertising to shoppers across the country and on the Internet."[83]

Simon Property Group is the world's largest retail landlord, controlling over seven percent of all of the

retail space in the world and with over 180 million square feet of gross leaseable area. Beginning in 1995, Simon invested millions of dollars to determine what customers were seeking in shopping centers. The results of that study led Simon to the conclusion that it needed to establish itself in the consumer's mind as the customer's shopping center.[84]

It has streamlined its name to "Simon" and is spending $23 million on a multimedia campaign around the phrases, "Simon, simply the best shopping there is" and "Simply Simon." Each center owned by Simon has the "Simon" name as its preface. Words like "convenience," "selection," "value," and "entertainment" were chosen to convey Simon's branding program core message. Simon's aim is to have the name "Simon" associated with clean, safe, quality shopping environments with the retailers that customers want to shop. The ultimate goal, according to Simon CEO, David Simon, is for "Simon" to become the Microsoft of the shopping center industry.

In May 1997, Colonial Properties Trust, a shopping center company based in Birmingham, decided to unite its 40 shopping centers throughout the southeast under a single brand. Prior to this, each center in the Colonial portfolio was relatively autonomous with its own image and management objectives.[85] Colonial determined that each of its centers would include the name "Colonial" with a designation of "mall," "promenade" for community or power centers, or "shoppes" for neighborhood centers and the name of the market: for example, Colonial Promenade Montgomery. Colonial indicates that sales at its centers rose following implementation of the branding campaign. In one case, sales increased almost 30 percent.[86]

Colonial won the 1999 Maxi Award from the International Council of Shopping Centers Fall Management and Marketing Conference.[87] The award was given for Colonial's branding campaign, which was a multimedia effort themed around the metamorphosis of a butterfly, to communicate the changes taking place at each of Colonial's properties.

John Moss, a Colonial senior vice president, states, "The brand helps you set a standard – you can't hide from people knowing who owns the property, so you have to make sure that standards are set."[88]

The Mills Corporation has been extremely successful in branding efforts for its shopping centers. Mills has used name branding to associate the company with a certain shopping experience at its huge venues. Each Mills has 200 or more stores in an average of 1.5 million square feet of gross leaseable area and often includes five or six times as many anchor stores as most regional malls. Coupling the Mills name with the location of the Mills project (examples: Sawgrass Mills, Potomac Mills, etc.) has led to "destination shopping," according to the Mills corporate profile on the Web.[89]

Mills' advertising talks about a "shoppertainment environment" and leads with the slogan "Building a Brand." The catch phrase of the Mills advertising program is "Jump on the Brandwagon. The Power of The Mills." Mills stated position is that branding for it is not a fad. It is the "cornerstone of our corporate culture and has been for 14 years."[90]

The Mills Corporation is creating a new brand for urban areas called "Blocks." The Block at Orange in California opened in November 1998 and combines a pedestrian walk and Main Street design with nightclubs, restaurants, and cafes along with coffee shops, book and music stores, and fashion boutiques. The next "Block" will be in midtown Atlanta.

According to *Chain Store Age*,[91] The Block at Orange dedicates 70 percent of its square footage to great dining and entertainment and 30 percent to upscale shopping. This differs from even the traditional Mills projects that contain 70 percent value retailing and 30 percent entertainment.

Jerry Engen, vice president and development director for Mills, states, "We're the Lucent Technologies of retail: our track record empowers us to recruit and create store brands within our projects."[92] Engen credits the Mills success to location and branding. He goes on to say, "Our projects are the number one tourist attraction in every state we're in except for Florida, where we take second place behind Disney World."[93]

Caylor[94] quotes Mark Rivers, senior vice president of national accounts for Mills, who states, "We have been using branding as one of the foundations for the way we do business. Ours is not really a branding campaign; ours is more of a branding culture."

Australian shopping center group, Westfield Corporation, claims that it was the first shopping center company to brand itself in the 1960s. In Australia, all Westfield malls carry the corporate name and are

known as "shopping towns."[95] Westfield has hired an advertising firm to create the Westfield brand in the U.S., where Cuneo states, malls are traditionally marketed individually.

Frank Lowy, Sr., Westfield's founder, says that branding is something that Westfield has been doing for many years, even before it knew it had a brand.[96] Lowy tells about the time he was on the street in Australia and overheard someone say, "Let's go to Westfield," instead of, "let's go to a particular store." That, he says, led him to understand that he had a brand.

Randall Smith, Westfield's executive vice president of marketing, states, "Over three years, we developed a customer-service program that means the Westfield Shoppingtown stands for something: quality retail, exceptional customer service, and community involvement."[97]

The O'Connor Group and New England Development merged in 1996 and formed WellsPark Group.[98] A committee was formed to create a unified image for the company and its projects. Wells Park's aim was to convey a central theme through its advertising and standardization of its malls – the mall is the medium for all messages. Quoting Adrienne Davis-Brody, senior vice president of marketing for WellsPark Group, "WellsPark's goal is to manage the shopper's visit from the moment she pulls into the parking lot until she pulls out to leave. Customers will be 'managed' into the stores so that the optimal experience will be achieved."[99]

Prime Outlets, the world's largest owner of factory outlet malls, began a branding campaign for its 51 outlet malls in September 1998. Prime has spent $12 to $15 million to brand its portfolio.[100] Prime indicates that it would have spent $3 million dollars on its regular advertising campaign. David Phillips, executive vice president of Prime Retail Baltimore, states that Prime wants to make a 15 to 20 percent IRR. That being the case, Prime needs to generate $1.8 million more in NOI to cover those costs.

Holly Lazer, Prime's sponsorship manager, states that branding has become a key component in the retail sector in setting shopping centers apart.[101] She indicates that Prime wanted to create "one uniform product and one uniform experience for the shopper."[102]

CO-BRANDING

One area where shopping center companies are working hardest in their branding efforts is in co-branding. According to Kotler and Armstrong,[103] co-branding is the practice of using the established brand names of two different companies on the same product. In practical application, however, co-branding goes even farther. Co-branding has expanded to include synergistic relationships between companies through strategic alliances and marketing partnerships.

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Buss[104] indicates that companies need to dare to work with other brands. As an example, Buss cites big food companies that have discovered that co-branding can yield remarkable synergies while not diluting their own brands. "Co-branding brings two brands together to share costs and command consumer attention that neither brand could get alone." Banking has used co-branding to great advantage, especially in the marketing of credit cards.

Shopping center companies have taken a different tact with regard to co-branding. They are using the relationships with other branded products to jumpstart their own branding campaigns. In what could be best described as a "riding the coattails" mentality, shopping center companies are linking with other established brands to accelerate their brand recognition efforts.

Simon has affinity relationships with Pepsi, Visa, and AT&T, where products are featured prominently in Simon shopping venues and advertising. These products, on the other hand, access Simon's 2.3 billion shopper visits, which serves as a vehicle for their continued growth. According to Lauchenauer,[105] these relationships enable Simon to deliver discounts to customers and customers to

the retailers. One of the goals is for Simon to make its malls prime promotional real estate for non-retail marketers.[106]

General Growth Properties is using a web site called Mallibu.com as its branding vehicle. It advertises Mallibu.com as the industry's first full interactive, "true" mall web site. General Growth recently conducted a back-to-school promotion and sweepstakes with Pepsi-Cola, Virgin Records, Phillips, TWEC.com, and Playhear.com aimed at creating awareness of the Mallibu.com web site and driving traffic to its malls.

DOES MALL BRANDING MAKE SENSE?

Fox[107] says that in the current marketing climate, when such a premium is placed on accountability, it is surprising that corporate branding is receiving such prominence. Compared with product-related initiatives, it is extremely difficult to measure the impact of branding and justify its expense, according to Fox.

Cebrzynski[108] posits that brand campaigns do not always work, usually because the positioning conveyed is confusing. Hal Ritchie, principal of the Ritchie Branded Resource Group, believes that mass merchants have approached branding in an incorrect manner by not knowing what part of the market to go after – some or all.[109]

Change for the sake of change is a pretty worthless idea, according to Marconi.[110] He says that businesses should not do something without a reason.

In an article in *Shopping Centers Today* magazine, Hazel[111] asks the question, "Is Branding Working?" Hazel quotes Stephen Moore, an Oxford, Maryland-based marketing consultant who has served in senior marketing posts with retail real estate companies, The Rouse Company and Horizon Properties. Moore says, "It's a mistake for neophyte packagers to think you can put a name on a package and it becomes a brand."[112] Hazel says that the answer to the question of whether branding is working for retail real estate companies depends on whom you ask: shoppers or Wall Street analysts.

Gardner[113] states that "branding" is a grammatically suspect term. Branding, according to Gardner, has been "the hot topic in professional circles, the most popular class in graduate marketing programs, the most hyped concept in the field of marketing, and the most misapplied tool marketers have at their disposal."

Docters[114] indicates that brands are not always worth the time and attention they are getting. In fact, he says, there are times when companies should invest heavily in a brand and there are other times when they should refrain from heavy investment. The trick is knowing which course to take.

According to Docters, there are so many different definitions of brand equity that many brand managers think of it in fuzzy terms and therefore adopt general or "shotgun" measures for branding. This is a mistake, he says. Brands have specific uses and businesses should invest in branding only with specific aims in mind. This is the "rifle" approach.

Docters says that branding plays an especially powerful role in markets characterized by a high degree of uncertainty or mystery. In such markets, sheer belief or trust on the part of consumers can outweigh nearly all other considerations.

This raises the question of whether there is uncertainty or mystery in shopping centers. If one venue has a certain retailer and one does not, the customer will go to the shopping center that has the desired retailer. Branding does not play a part in that analysis, but rather the customer's need or want to shop where their preferred retailers are located.

Docters goes on to say that, based upon experiences in various markets, branding is most effective when applied with precision to specific customer decisions; the aforementioned "rifle" approach. Using this approach, Docters has formulated three rules for branding:

1. Brand is a function of audience, product, price, and message, not your company.
2. Target the decisions, if you can.
3. Be selective in spending on brand.

Docters states that "brand is most powerful when tailored to the decisions your customers make – a rifle approach. In particular, a brand is a tool for swaying customers and potential customers who cannot or will not fully investigate all aspects of their purchase decision.

Whether shopping center companies are branding a product or service, Murphy[115] indicates that 19 out of every 20 new brands fail and frequently the reasons for this failure cannot be determined. He states that failure of a brand can often be traced to the fact that the new products or services are insufficiently differentiated, of the wrong quality,

incorrectly priced, inadequately supported, inadequately distributed or in some other way not appealing to the consumer. The producer of a new brand must be prepared to invest heavily in the new brand even though the chances of success are small.

In a chapter called "Branding the Corporation," Mottram states that, 'the key challenge for companies at the end of the twentieth century will be realizing the potential of their corporate brands. In today's markets, companies increasingly compete on the basis of intangible factors and the reputation of the corporation itself is often the most valuable and most misunderstood intangible of all."[116]

Contrary to the popular marketing mantra that a famous name is all an entity needs, Mottram states that, "Companies are realizing that possessing a well-known name such as Shell, Visa, or CBS does not, in itself, signify a strong corporate brand. Finding techniques for branding the corporation effectively is now more important than ever."

Mottram states that companies that focus on their corporate brands will lead their markets and be the creators of new categories and opportunities. "In tomorrow's competitive markets, only the bravest or most foolish should overlook the potential of their corporate brand."

Hart[117] posits that, "Brands are financial assets, every bit as much as plant machinery and stock. Indeed, brands are arguably the most valuable assets of all in that, in theory, they do not have a finite life and therefore will not depreciate."

DOES THE CUSTOMER CARE?

A corollary question to whether mall branding makes sense is the issue of whether the customer cares about the brand of the mall or shopping venue. Cebrzynski[118] says that branding is a powerful tool, but it is also the current darling of marketers. He calls it the latest marketing "rage."

Martinez[119] quotes Alf Nucifora, of the strategic consulting firm, Nucifora Consulting Group, who states, "My question is: Does the consumer care? My visceral response is that it really doesn't seem to make a lot of sense, certainly not from the consumer perspective. I would doubt that a customer is going to care whether or not the local mall is owned and managed by a certain company."

Rohlander[120] says that as consumers cultivate discernment, the need to have a brand strategy is increasing. Branding, he indicates is about creating an image in the eye and mind of the customer.

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Arnold, Handelman, and Tigert[121] found that consumers patronize stores that are easier to go to and offer lower prices. They found that the impact of symbolic actions of retailers such as community involvement, attractive displays and other amenities can influence store choice in a positive way in the customers' minds. Since consumer patronage is measured by store choice, the retailers that make extra efforts will capture the customers. Shopping centers that have these retailers will be the ones to which the consumers will gravitate, which lends credence to the position that it is the stores, not the center that contains the stores, that is the determinant of where customers will shop. Shopping center branding may enhance this effect if shopping center companies avail themselves of the co-branding effect of using these retailers as attractors.

Central place theory states that consumers patronize the nearest shopping venue, however, they also tend to make disproportionately more trips to larger centers, which gives retailers at larger centers a competitive advantage.[122] Agglomeration research shows that centers with more anchors, which by necessity are the larger centers, are better locations for smaller stores because of increased traffic.[123]

Larger centers are attractive to most customers. Retailers at larger centers have a competitive advantage and the larger shopping centers that can provide space for these retailers have a competitive

advantage as well. If shopping center companies can imprint upon the mind of the consumer that they are the place where consumers can find what they are looking for, this branding should result in increased customer trips and locating of desired retailers in their shopping venues.

This position is confirmed by Huff[124] and his basic gravitational model which shows that the drawing power exercised on a consumer in an area is directly proportional to the size of the retail center and inversely proportional to the customer's distance or travel time to the shopping center.[125] According to Nevin and Houston,[126] a large center means greater utility for the consumer since it has a larger product assortment, but distance represents a dis-utility to the consumer.

In their study, Nevin and Houston added a retail image component to the Huff gravitational model. They found that the assortment of preferred retailers has a strong influence on the consumer's level attraction to a shopping center. Nevin and Houston also found that a "special store" variable is highly predictive of drawing power. According to Nevin and Houston, consumers are drawn to a particular center because of the existence of a special store that appeals to them.

Finn and Louviere[127] confirm that the nature of the retailers at a center impacts patronage. In a study of anchor store contribution to shopping center image, they found that 70 to 90 percent of the variance in collective perceptions of shopping centers could be accounted for by store mix and the presence of particular major and discount department stores. Discount department stores had a consistently negative impact on such favorable center perceptions as high quality, wide selection, good service, and latest fashions. In fact, Finn and Louviere found that the number of discount department stores accounted for the greatest proportion of image variance.

While branding of a shopping center name has become a major initiative with these companies, the retailers that are available for customers to shop at these venues is of critical importance. There is an assumption as set forth above that the branding effort of the shopping center companies may make their venues more attractive for the retailers desired by the consumers. It would appear, however, that there is a catch-22 working here, in that, shopping center companies need the retailers to attract the customers, but need the customers to attract the retailers. The branding effort may enhance this three-way attraction, but only as long as the shopping center companies can make good on their promises to both the customers and the retailers.

In order for branding to be a worthwhile endeavor for a given shopping center company, it needs to bring something to the party that is better than or different from what every other shopping center company is doing. There has to be a special quality or special qualities that one shopping center company has that another does not. With those qualities comes a promise from the shopping center company to consistently deliver them to the consumer.

Taher, Leigh, and French[128] found that customers need to be delighted beyond their expectations to make them recommend a store. Customer delight can be delivered through service augmentation, which is the responsibility of everybody in the retail operation. According to Taher, et.al., patronage loyalty is developed on both past, unexpected delightful experiences and future expectations.

The analog here is that shopping center companies must deliver not only the stores that provide the "delightful" experience, but also must provide a delightful experience for the whole shopping trip. If customers associate their delightful shopping with the name of the shopping center company providing it, then branding would be of some merit. Otherwise, the branding effort may be for naught.

De Chernatony and Riley[129] talk about the "virtuous circle of service branding." They state, "One might think in terms of a virtuous circle, wherein a strong "company as brand" identity permeates all services provided by the organization and differentiates them from the competition, by providing a relevant focus to both consumers and employees. This can be achieved using internal marketing to motivate the employees, stimulate them to offer a better service, and to delight customers. In turn, this delight makes the service company more differentiated from competitors and more relevant to consumers. Favorable word-of-mouth then spreads, reinforcing an image in consumers' minds consistent with the caring identity the company wants to

project, completing the virtuous circle of service branding."[130]

According to Stephen Moore, it makes no sense to brand a regional shopping center for the shopper.[131] Moore says, "What they're (shopping center companies, supplied) doing is not branding; it's closer to institutional advertising."[132] Moore goes on to say that the analogy of successful branding of other companies, products, and services may not work with shopping centers. "Think about when the choice of where to shop is made—When we're home 30 minutes from the mall. It's about convenience."[133]

Ziccardi and Moin[134] ask the question "Is a Great Name Enough to Make a Successful Brand?" The answer, they claim, is that there is a long list of products and stores that stand for nothing in the minds of customers. Unfortunately, according to Ziccardi and Moin, the people behind these products or running these stores do not know it. They say that consumers are not fooled and, eventually, these products and even the stores disappear.

Mottram[135] states that, "The most important factor that shapes the corporate brands of tomorrow will be the increasing sophistication of consumers. When it comes to consumption, the public is increasingly media-advertising-design-brand- literate and, after more than 50 years of the consumer society, has lost its naivete. It seems unlikely, therefore, that companies will ever be able to 'dazzle' the consumers with empty promises again. This has fundamental implications for all brands, not least for corporate brands."

CONCLUSION

In order for branding to be a worthwhile endeavor for a given shopping center company, it needs to bring something to the party that is better than or different from what every other shopping center company is doing. There has to be a special quality or special qualities that one shopping center company has that another does not. With those qualities comes a promise from the shopping center company to consistently deliver them to the consumer.

Shopping center companies must create in the minds of their customers an engram, where the name of the shopping center company is independent of the designated shopping venue. As with Westfield (supra), the consumer's mindset as they think about a shopping trip needs to be such that they want to go to branded mall instead of just a generalized idea to trek to the local shopping venue.

If it can be done correctly, branding can be a powerful tool in the shopping center marketing "tool box." If done incorrectly, all the shopping center company will have accomplished is to slap its name onto its centers with no discernable end result. Branding can enable a shopping center company to tap into a set of stored values and create a covenant relationship with the customer.

Shopping center companies need to realize that the branding process can occur very quickly in the current age of "hype marketing." Brand equity can result in the necessary awareness, perceived quality, and strong associations that shopping center companies want to create in their customers.

It is up to the shopping center companies to deliver the goods. They not only need to market themselves to consumers. Shopping center companies must market their centers to the desired retailers. It is a territorial imperative that the shopping center venues contain the retailers that customers want to shop. A shopping center company can create all the brand equity it desires, but if a customer wants to shop at Old Navy, TJ Maxx, Abercrombie & Fitch, etc. and the given center does not have that particular retailer, the customers will go where those retailers are located.

Central place and agglomeration theories are important in this context. The larger and more proximate the center, the stronger likelihood that customers will shop there. Delighting the customer once they make the journey to the center is the essence of whether branding in a given instance will be effective.

If shopping center companies can deliver the shopping center experience in an entertaining and interesting environment with the kind of retailers that customers want to shop in a convenient venue, then branding may be a worthwhile endeavor. If not, the shopping center company will likely stand for nothing in the mind of the consumer and they will not survive the branding. REI

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