

The real estate industry is **struggling with an unprecedented** glut of vacant shops in malls. **And everyone has** one question in mind, is it possible for any developer to survive in such a harsh scenario? **Few exceptional players** like **Advance India Projects Limited (AIPL)** have answers to it with their unique and outstanding ideas.

Realty renovators

FOR the mall owners of today, who are mainly dealing with pure rental retail customers, the real challenge lies in maintaining the consistency of footfalls even in already successfully running malls.

Delhi-based developer AIPL has taken the lead by partnering with the India debut of Wal Mart, Cinepolis and M&S in Amritsar (Punjab) at The Celebration Mall, which was a path-breaking development. Not just unexpected, it is indeed commendable for any developer to go to a tier II city

rather than a metro like Delhi, Mumbai or Bengaluru and that too, for their flagship project. There is no developer today who has shown the valour to launch in the toughest quarter of the Indian retail real estate industry. Not only this, AIPL has impressed one and all by launching the project as per the planned date.

AIPL enjoys a diverse portfolio of malls and builds property for brands by meticulously researching their primary (retailers) and secondary customers (shoppers) and decides on individual positioning for each shopping mall. So, if in Udaipur, it is positioned as India's

first heritage mall, meant exclusively for the Maharajas of retail, then in Amritsar it is a city-centric mall with world-class collection of brands and out-of-the-box services and branding, through a new concept of The Celebration Bazaar.

AIPL presents

an excellent business opportunity for foreign and overseas retail brands, looking for a base in India. They are presently in the process of developing new age townships, residential complexes, IT parks and a chain of world-class malls, offering an irresistible mix of entertainment, shopping and leisure in truly international surrounds.

The bazaar is back

Surveys suggest that organised retail has not been able to shift the focus entirely away from local traditional markets. The shoppers prefer to shop there because of familiarity of the setting, ease of access and a variety of goods catering to local sensibilities. On the other hand, Indian consumers with their changing lifestyle are enjoying the convenience provided by the malls from parking spaces, air-conditioned shopping ambience, multiple brands and options for entertainment and dining, under one roof. To cater to this diverse and wide audience, AIPL has researched and come up with the concept of modern bazaars that combine the best features of both the



The Celebration Mall, Amritsar



Arif Sheikh

President Retail, Advance India Projects Limited

'Goals are dreams with deadlines'

He is someone who believes in dreaming big and achieving it too. He has over 26 years of experience in international retail and has won some of the most coveted laurels in the industry. He's an achiever, who believes 'Goals are dreams with deadlines'. Here, Arif Sheikh, President, Retail, Advance India Projects Limited, talks about the best practices in real estate and retail industries.

Retail has radically changed in the last few years. What is your prediction for the future?

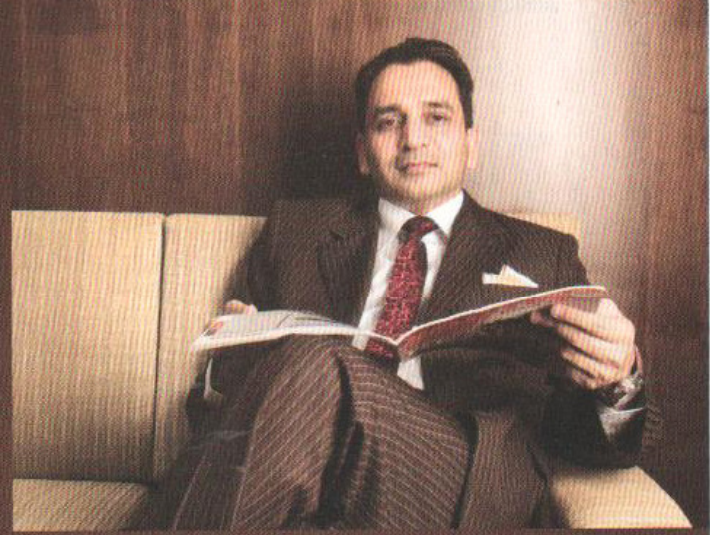
The harsh message is that everything will happen much faster. Every product cycle, every information cycle and every new format will emerge faster because of better technology, hostile competition and young workforce. There's every reason to believe that those who are really stressed out by the rate of change now will be even more stressed out later. However, there's a new generation which is growing up with this as the normal pace of life.

Some in real estate have argued that AIPL's value and trust-driven business module is very difficult to scale up? What do you have to say?

You have to recognise, and we don't mean this in an acrimonious sense, that people in this business are trying to make money between now and next Thursday. We're trying to build a company that's going to be there even 50 to 100 years from now. We owe that to the communities in which we do business, to our employees who can count on us for security, to our customers and to our suppliers. And all this translates into one word for all of us at AIPL, 'TRUST.'

What's the first thing you look for when you go to your own The Celebration Mall?

I try to approach it from the standpoint of a customer, the comfort



level for our retailers, shoppers, the services, brand mix, parking staff attitude and every possible touch point where customers come in contact with mall management. It is extremely important to be objective and not biased towards things you have designed yourself. The only way to constant improvisation is constant appraisal, which must be unbiased.

At the mall, number of franchisors is high -'Is it by design?'

To us, franchising is the licensing of a business process, which provides rapid increase in operational capacity. Owning a franchise allows you to go into business for yourself, but not by yourself. So to match our expansion plan, we have to work with time-proven business module and i.e. franchisee has reduced risk of failure, proven methods and products with start-up assistance from established brands.

formats. It has created a hybrid platform, where high street meets the malls to give birth to a new concept called The Celebration Bazaar.

This concept has been designed keeping in mind the shoppers in local tier II and III cities. AIPL has introduced this pioneering concept and a new retail format, which is being seen to be the turning point in the ongoing retail revolution in the country. The Celebration Bazaar provides a platform for retailers (international, national and local) to operate flourishing outlets at surprisingly affordable prices and minimal operational cost.

With this hybrid model in place, the gap between the organised and unorganised retail is being easily bridged. The format ensures that local retailers get an affordable platform to engage and participate actively in the retail revolution.

AIPL is coming up with 19 bazaars across the country. This will be a paradigm shift in the way business is conducted in this vertical. With limited number of domestic retailers (which according to industry estimates is less

than 1,000), targeting high street retailers (who are more than 12 million), will change the scenario considerably. AIPL is seeking new opportunities, joint venture tie-ups and capital funds with reputed international developers to expand its corporate commercial segment. It is always in search of opportunities in international franchising for the Indian retail market.

For starters, they will change the demand and supply scenario and give a thrust to high street retailers with ambitions to go one notch above. With this format, AIPL shall serve a wider audience by providing customised solutions to MNC as well as local retailers. Arif Sheikh, President, Retail, Advance India Projects Limited, says, "We, at AIPL, aspire to be a vital part of the franchise growth in India. We are open to provide a platform for those who are interested in India's booming franchise industry."

Innovation is our differentiation

Not just the Bazaars, AIPL has been able to make a mark with its advent into

the retail industry with The Celebration Mall, Amritsar. They have not only pioneered new and exciting formats across all verticals but also managed to do it, starting pre-operations stage involving partners at all levels. From breaking the clutter and talking to the leasing teams of different brands or innovative direct marketing initiatives like associating the royalty of retail with the crown jewel of Rajasthan retail - The Celebration Mall, Udaipur, through the pagdi and bahi khata, AIPL has proven itself in all areas.

The approach has always been from head to heart, a popular theory that dwells on memories, emotions and feelings that influence people's behaviour when faced with a brand communication. Be it a direct mailer or an event poster, emotions drive the customer. According to AIPL, brands are built on trust. To impact the company's bottom line, one needs to get in touch with the customer's emotions. Brands are about feelings, not facts and understanding, this is taking AIPL way ahead in a competitive environment.

The idea does not always have to be



*The Celebration Mall,
Udaipur*

about spending millions on monologues and swamping the market, it's about listening to the consumer's voice. It could be anything from comments on a page on Facebook to a simple feedback form. Many companies fail to realise that they need to move closer to the consumers and learn how to thrive in a world, where information can be shared in seconds. AIPL believes in staying close to the customer, whether it is the direct customer, i.e. the retailer, who partners with their properties or the consumer, who walks into The Celebration experience.

The intent of AIPL venturing into the retail space also coincided with their management's unanimous decision to build spaces that can not only make the consumers smile from the moment they enter, but are also able to celebrate all the small and big occasions of life. This is the theme of their mall at all levels, one can find a range of unique services like roving ambassadors to escort the customers anywhere in the mall or international surveys like RSI and CSI (Retailer Satisfaction Index and Customer Satisfaction Index), wherein customer and retailer feedback is religiously sought every fortnight. This ensures a thorough check on the quality

of experience provided by the mall. After doing a record number of 10 events in a span of four weeks, the mall has firmly entrenched itself as the favourite hangout destination in Amritsar. Events like 'Taare Zameen Par' found huge success with participation by 1,600 children for a drawing competition while 'Ghar Ki Adaalat' ensured that husbands always remember who the real the boss is. On one occasion, grandfathers walked the ramp in style to the applauding audience while at another occasion, serious issues like environment protection through competitions like extempore, precise writing and poster making by kids, were taken with equal enthusiasm. Sheikh, says, "We have taken a different route from what most real estate developers in the country have been doing till now. Our marketing initiatives are driven by our customer demand. We are focusing on both levels, as a developer, ensuring maximum revenue generation for our retailers (be it McDonalds, Cinopolis or any of our local partners) and just loads of celebration, for all the customers who visit us."

The mall is intensively focusing on detail and some of the most innovative methods heard of to engage and

enthrall the customers. The climbing joker in the central atrium, something that excites children and older people alike, is a huge attraction. The car parking labels have been so innovatively done, using colours and mnemonics that everyone in the family remembers the location of the car, even after spending hours in the mall. The parking lot not only has parking signs but also interesting storyboards that engage the customer from the very moment they enter the place. Each of the three basements is themed with different stories, from history of cars to food and delicacies to getaways close to Amritsar. Even the washrooms have interesting things like tit-bits about washroom etiquettes, snippets about toiletries, jokes and interactive panels. No part or person at the mall leaves any stone unturned in making sure that every visit by the customer is an absolutely memorable one. There is no denial that every visit is truly a celebration at The Celebration Mall.

*To partner, contact
Rachna Choudhary at
Email: rachna@advanceindia.co.in
Mobile: 91- 9810834840*