



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Research <i>Review</i>	1
• Shopping Center Web Sites	
• Mall Sales Are Related to Customer Demographics & Habits	
• Factory Outlet Center Industry	
• A First Look at the Retail Segment of the 1997 Economic Census for the U.S.	
• Academics Research Shopping Centers	
 ANALYST ALLEY	23
• The ABCs of Mall Grading: The Objective Facts on a Subjective Tool	
 EYE ON THE ECONOMY	25
• Department Store Same-Store Sales	
• U.S. Mall Sales	
• Factory Outlet Same-Store Sales Report	
• Factory Outlet Sales Index	
• U.S. Construction	
• Canadian Construction	
• Canadian Mall Sales	
 PLUGGED in	38
• Helpful Sites on the Web for Researchers	
• Schedule of Major Data Releases August–October 1999	

Shopping Center Web Sites

Owner/Developers explore ways of getting the most out of the new medium

Articles in the last two issues of *Research Quarterly* have looked at the Internet mostly from the standpoint of consumer online sales projections: “The New Cottage Industry—Forecasting Internet Retail Sales” Winter 1998-99, Vol. 5, No. 4, and “Consumer Online Sales” Spring 1999, Vol. 6, No. 1. These articles have examined competing estimates of current and future Internet sales and sought to get a sense of how big the online channel is likely to be.

In the meantime, shopping center owner/developers have been exploring ways of using the new medium to drive traffic to their centers and serve existing customers. Recent studies indicate that the number of Internet-researched purchases made at conventional stores exceeds online purchases by a factor of about five to one.¹ Therefore, the perception that shopping centers and the Internet are two monolithic opposing forces on a collision course is at best oversimplistic, although some shopping center operators have been quicker than others to exploit the fact that consumers often do research and gather information about a product over the Internet and then close the deal at their local shopping center. Although the efforts of owner/developers to exploit the Internet are currently still in their infancy, some developers are aggressively using the Web for information, marketing and public relations, in addition to the non-consumer-oriented functions of providing leasing and investor information.

To see exactly what developers were doing with their Web sites, ICSC visited the sites of the 50 top shopping center owners (ranked according to total shopping center GLA by *Shopping Center World*, January 1999). Of the 50 developers, 42 (84%) maintained corporate Web sites as of July 1999.² Two primary types of sites exist—those that provide information and those that

interactively engage potential shoppers. Additionally, some developers’ Web sites have a tourist-oriented component. Detailed results of the survey are presented in Table 1.

CORPORATE AND LEASING INFORMATION

A large proportion of the sites provide access to financial information such as annual reports, quarterly reports and other SEC filings. Beyond investor relations information, the focus of many developers’ sites was to attract new tenants. These sites offer information regarding available tenant space and the name and contact numbers of the leasing agents. Information regarding specific shopping center properties consists primarily of the amount of available leasing space,

¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, “The Emerging Digital Economy II” June 1999, p.6.; New Research at www.forrester.com, July 6, 1999.; Beth Cox, www.internetnews.com “Survey: Offline Benefits More from Online Shoppers”, July 2, 1999.

² An additional three sites were being developed and had no functionality at the time of the survey.



Web Sites of Shopping Center

	Developer	Web Address	Investor Information	Mall Link	Directions to Center	Location Map	Mall Hours	Store Directory
1	Acadia Realty Trust	www.acadiarealty.com	yes			■		
2	Aronov Realty	www.aronov.com www.shopmalls.com		mall-only site	■	■	•	■
3	Benderson Development Co Inc	no Web site						
4	Bradley Real Estate	www.bradleyrealestate.com	yes					
5	Burnham Pacific	www.burnhampacific.com	yes	•		■		
6	The Cafaro Co	www.cafarocompany.com		•		■	•	
7	Cambridge Shopping Centres Ltd	www.cambridgemalls.com	yes			■	■	■
8	CBL & Associates Properties Inc	www.cblproperties.com	yes			■	•	■
9	Center Trust	no Web site						
10	CenterAmerica Property Trust	www.centeramerica.com				■		
11	Colonial Properties Trust	www.colonialprop.com	yes					
12	Crown American Realty Trust	www.crownam.com	yes		•	■	•	■
13	Developers Diversified Realty Corp	www.ddrc.com	yes			•		
14	Don M. Casto Organization	www.donmcasto.com				■		
15	EBL & S Property Management Inc	no Web site						
16	Edens & Avant	www.edensandavant.com						
17	Federal Realty Investment Trust	www.federalrealty.com	yes					
18	Forest City Enterprises Inc	www.fceinc.com	yes	•	•	•	•	•
19	General Growth Properties	www.generalgrowth.com	yes	•	•	■	•	•
20	Glimcher Realty Trust	www.glimcher.com	yes	•	•	•	•	•
21	Inland Real Estate Investment Corp/ Inland Commercial Property Management	www.inlandgroup.com				•		
22	IRT Property Co	www.irtproperty.com	yes					
23	JDN Realty Corp	www.irinfo.com/jdn	yes					
24	JP Realty Inc	www.jprealty.com	yes	•				•
25	Kimco Realty Corp	www.kimcorealty.com	yes			■		
26	Kravco Co	www.kravco.com		•	•	•	•	•
27	The Kroenke Group	no Web site						
28	LaSalle Partners Inc	www.lasalle.com	yes			■		
29	The Macerich Co	www.macerich.com	yes			■		■
30	The Mills Corp	www.millscorp.com	yes	■	■	■	■	■
31	New Plan Excel Realty Trust	www.nprt.com	yes					
32	Prime Retail	www.primetail.com	yes			■	■	■
33	The Pyramid Co	www.pyramidmg.com						
34	R.D. Management Corp	www.rdmanagement.com						
35	The Richard E. Jacobs Group	www.rejacobsgroup.com www.shopyourmall.com		mall-only site	■	■	■	■
36	Rosen Associates Management Corp	www.rosenmgmt.com				■		
37	The Rouse Co	www.therousecompany.com	yes	•	•	•	•	•
38	The RREEF Funds	www.rreef.com						
39	Schostak Brothers & Co	www.schostak.com						
40	Simon Property Group	www.simon.com	yes					
41	S.R. Weiner & Associates Inc	www.srweiner.com		■	■	■	■	■
42	Taubman Centers Inc	www.taubman.com	yes			■		
43	Urban Shopping Centers Inc	www.myspre.com		mall-only site		■		■
		some centers have their own Web site			■	■	■	■
44	Vornado Realty Trust	under construction						
45	Weingarten Realty Investors	www.weingarten.com	yes					
46	WellsPark Group	www.mallsus.com		mall-only site	■	■	■	■
47	Westcor Partners	www.westcor.com			•	■	■	•
48	Westfield Holdings Inc	www.westfieldamerica.com	yes					
49	Wilmore Inc	www.wilmore.com		■	■	■	■	■
50	Zamias Services Inc	no Web site						

* Alphabetical listing by *Shopping Center World* January, 1999.

Column Headings Explanations:

Mall Link: A link to a separate mall page is given, or a separate mall-only site exists.

Retail Promotion: Site provides information regarding new stores or sales.

Retailer Site Link: A link to at least one retailer's Web site is given.



Owners* (alphabetical list)

Mall Map	Retail Promotion	Retailer Site Link	Mall Special Events	Online Activity	Tourist Information	Comments
		■	•	• coupons		designed for leasing
						designed for leasing
	•		•	• coupon		designed for leasing
■				• online sales		designed for leasing
■	•		•	■ coupons		
						designed for leasing
		■	■			designed for leasing; list of centers
						designed for leasing
						designed for leasing
						site being re-developed
						designed for leasing; list of centers
•	•	•	•	• sweepstakes	•	
•			•		•	
•		•	•	• kid's club registration, coupon	•	
						designed for leasing
						no property information
						no center name listing
						designed for leasing
•	•	•	•	• coupons, kid's club registration, gift certificate	•	
						designed for leasing
■						
■	•	•	•	• coupons	■	
						list of centers
	•		■	■ e-mail for promotional updates	■	
						designed for leasing
	■		•	■ gift certificate		
						designed for leasing
•	•	•	•	■ shopper club registration, • coupons, • select merchandise purchase	•	
						no property information
						site being developed
•	•		■	■ shopper club registration, gift certificate • e-mail for promotional updates		online activity on main site
	■		•	■ shopper club registration	■	designed for leasing
■	■	■	•	■ e-mail questions to personal shopper	■	site is tourist -oriented
						site being developed
•	•	•	•	■ sweepstakes entry; • coupons		list of centers
	■		■	• coloring contest	•	information regarding shopper club program on main site
						main site has retail promotion
		■	■			designed for leasing

Key
 • = information applicable to some of the centers
 ■ = information applicable to most of the centers
 A blank entry means no information was found



anchor tenants, site plans and aerial photos. Some sites list specifics that might recommend the center's location to a potential tenant; that is, demographics of the surrounding area, convenience of access from major roads, proximity to landmarks or tourist attractions. Several of these sites have pictures of the shopping centers that viewers can click on to enlarge the image.

SHOPPER INFORMATION

In addition to (or, in some instances, instead of) leasing specifics, some sites offer shopper-friendly center information. These sites provide specifics that potential center visitors might want to know when researching a shopping center. Information such as detailed directions to the center (primarily by car, but public transportation options, if applicable, are sometimes provided) and hours of operation, allow Web-site visitors to plan the logistics of a visit.

Some developers advertise for the retailers in their centers by providing store listings, often with phone numbers for individual stores. In some cases, stores are grouped by store type (i.e., department store, electronics store, etc.), allowing Web users to collect the names of all the retailers that offer a particular merchandise type. Often, sites provide a mall map.

Other sites go further to entice potential shoppers by highlighting new stores in the centers and/or promoting sales and special offers from individual retailers. Some developers offer links to the home pages of retail companies.

Other developers' sites promote events and services not necessarily associated with shopping. Site visitors are made aware of special programs for children such as art clubs, community/charity involvement, mall walking clubs or the availability of rental rooms for private functions. These offerings entice Web users to go to the shopping center for reasons other than just shopping.

INTERACTING WITH POTENTIAL SHOPPERS

The sites that invest a further level of effort in converting Internet users to shopping center visitors are those that engage visitors in online activities. There are several methods employed:

1. Presenting a discount coupon on the site that the user can print and redeem at the participating mall. Similarly, the computer user can print out a sweepstakes entry form and bring it to the mall for a chance to win mall gift certificates.
2. Requesting the user's e-mail address and offering to send information about future shopping center promotions.
3. Providing Web users with the ability to apply online for entry into frequent shopper and/or awards programs. At one site, users are able to apply for a free card that offers discounts at area hotels, attractions, museums and restaurants, as well as retail locations.
4. Allowing Web-site visitors to make an online purchase of mall gift certificates. Thus, users can search the site to find a shopping center near the recipient of the gift certificate and arrange for the center to mail the certificate.

In addition to providing a service to the Web user, these methods also have the potential to relay valuable user information back to the shopping center owner. The information thus obtained can be used for specialized marketing campaigns in the future.

Some developers distinguish between the two Web-site audiences—potential tenants and shoppers—and separate their offerings for each. The main corporate site is designed to attract potential tenants, while links direct shoppers to areas of their interest, including the home page of individual centers or to a separate page that provides consumer-oriented information for each of the developer's centers.

CATERING TO TOURISTS

An interesting subset comprised sites that employ methods to attract tourists and tour groups. These sites serve Web users who wish to research shopping centers other than the one nearest to them: A trip to the mall could be an element of vacation planning. As such, these developers gear part of their sites to the needs of a potential vacation shopper. Arrangements for tour groups, such as the availability of motorcoach parking and prepaid meal vouchers, are detailed. Special incentives are advertised for tour group leaders and bus drivers. Some sites list nearby hotels, museums, restaurants, golf courses



and other vacation travel destinations. In some instances, specific information such as prices for theater tickets or the admission cost of amusement parks is also given. At least one site offers links to the Web pages of popular sightseeing attractions.

ONLINE SHOPPING

Some developers are experimenting with online shopping, although actual live, operational sites of this nature are still a rarity. However, one example is Oakville Place Shopping Centre (www.oakvilleplace.com, owned and managed by Cambridge Shopping Centres Ltd). Currently, 21 retail stores (including one department store) and one dental office participate. As of mid-July, the retailers offered between 1 and 78 items, each accompanied by a picture and brief description. The available items are varied and include clothing, luggage, movie videos, cameras and gift certificates for beauty treatments.

Web users are able to search the merchandise selection by store or by merchandise category. Desired items are selected and placed in a "shopping basket" and payment is made with a major credit card. The site also has a date-

specific currency converter that converts Canadian dollars to and from a variety of other currencies. Orders are shipped from the shopping center generally within 24 hours of placement. A shipping charge is attached but users can avoid this cost by picking up their order from the concierge at the center. The site offers international shipping. However, because they must be redeemed at the center, mall gift certificates are delivered only within the trade area (Ontario and Quebec). Should the user wish to return the order, the package must be sent to the "Website Office" at the shopping center with an authorization number obtained from the office.

Shopping center owner/developers are just beginning to harness the Internet to extend their marketing reach and serve existing customers. However, some companies are also adopting a "wait and see" attitude. Most companies are still formulating their Internet strategies, and further experimentation can be expected in the coming months.

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