

Experience Is The New Anchor

The Top 5 Design Considerations For Experiential Retail Centers

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Mountain View Village, Riverton, UT

Retail centers are evolving, with experience at the forefront and entertainment venues emerging as the new anchors. Consumer expectations are at an all-time high, driving retailers to engage customers like never before. Gone are the days when shopping centers relied on products to drive sales. Today, customers are seeking out places that can deliver a 360-degree experience, encompassing fun activities, great food, new entertainment, as well as the latest products, goods, and services.

As the era of the department store as the only anchor fades, reimagining existing shopping centers is increasingly important to developers, cities, and communities. The rise of sports and adventure tourism delivers the perfect opportunity to fill the void, revitalizing retail destinations and offering something new. Today, we are seeing sports and adventure-themed offerings such as pickleball, surf parks, mini golf, bowling, indoor climbing gyms, roller skating rinks and trampoline parks replacing former department store locations. Additionally, live music and entertainment venues like theaters and comedy clubs, as well as family entertainment centers (FECs) like arcades, batting cages, go-karts and bumper boats are great ways to attract visitors and keep them coming back for more.



Concepts like Chicken N Pickle and Dink & Dine combine the trendy sport of pickleball and exciting gourmet menu.



Surfing takes center stage at many mixed-use surf-anchored developments popping up across the US where people can gather, spectate, participate, and enjoy diverse on site amenities.

When designing and planning retail centers with entertainment anchors, it is important to keep the following best practices in mind:

- 1. Create a mix of uses:** The best retail centers offer a variety of uses, including entertainment, shopping, dining, and office space. This mix of uses creates a vibrant and inviting environment for shoppers, increasing dwell time, which is key to the success of all centers.
- 2. Make it easy to get around:** The retail center should be easy to navigate, with clear wayfinding and ample parking. Shoppers should be able to easily get from one entertainment venue to another, as well as to the surrounding shops and restaurants.
- 3. Design for flexibility:** The retail center should be designed in a way that allows for flexibility in the future. Multi-purpose spaces allow areas to be easily converted to support a variety of uses.
- 4. Integrate art and landscape:** Placemaking is critical in establishing an experiential retail center. Elements like local art, verdant landscape, outdoor furniture, pocket parks, found objects, and water features create unique and Instagrammable moments where people want to gather, and be seen in person and on social media.
- 5. Incorporate green features:** Shoppers are increasingly looking for retail centers that are sustainable and environmentally friendly. Developers can incorporate green features such as solar panels, rainwater harvesting, and energy-efficient lighting.

Overall, the trend of entertainment venues as the new anchor in retail center developments is a positive one for both consumers and developers. Entertainment venues offer a fun and engaging experience for shoppers, and they can help to revitalize retail centers. Developers who are able to attract entertainment anchors to their properties can benefit from increased traffic, sales, dwell times, rental rates, and an overall more vibrant and inviting center.

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At 2nd & PCH in Long Beach, a pop-up roller rink has taken up semi-permanent residence in an anchor space originally envisioned for a major tech retailer.



As is the case with at Mountain View Village in Riverton, UT, food halls continue to draw in visitors for local dining and unique experiences.



AO is a relationship-focused, design-driven architectural, interior, and planning services firm helping clients create places where people and businesses flourish. Nearing its 50th year, the firm boasts wide-ranging expertise across multifamily, retail, hospitality, mixed-use, science and technology, data centers, restaurant, healthcare, office, industrial, parking, landscape, interiors, and global design, modular, transit-oriented development, and public utilities. AO is known for its ardent collaboration with developers and owners and deep expertise across various building types. AO operates from studios in Orange, San Diego, Oakland, and Sunnyvale, CA, New York, NY, Atlanta, GA, and Orlando, FL, where it serves clients around the globe.

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