

LET'S GET CREATIVE

Creative thinking is needed to reverse the decline in footfall says OnBrand

Rather than killing the high street, online has breathed new life into bricks and mortar retail as the so-called threat from internet shopping has resulted in a surge of creativity to entice and engage shoppers, turning shopping centres into retail destinations. Online may have the goods, but physical retail has the experience and some malls are reporting resilient footfall, and that is largely down to the increasingly creative approach being adopted by shopping centres.

"People still like to touch and see goods before they buy, and that is why footfall numbers are still high," says Andrea Petrou, social media and content manager at OnBrand. "However, centres are now looking at other ways to draw their customers in, and that's through creativity."

She gives the Disney Café in Birmingham from Primark, and Ping Pong Parlours as examples of less-traditional tenants. The latter concept has already opened in over 30 shopping centres nationwide and form part of Table Tennis England's vision to inspire people to get active and lead happier, healthier lifestyles by introducing table tennis into unexpected, non-traditional places.

Most recently, the Baytree shopping centre in Brentwood

welcomed its own Ping Pong Parlour, inviting families to participate in the fun. Centre manager Dan Foley champions the less-conventional tenant: "We are delighted to be opening a Ping Pong Parlour within the centre, which we felt would engage the community and provide a fun place where everyone could have fun in a safe way."

Earlier this year in Romford, The Brewery teamed up with charity, All Things Made Public, to create a range of wildlife illustrations. Working with a graffiti artist, the art trail murals, made up of animals found in the local area, will now be given a further creative twist with an augmented reality app aiming to bring these animals to life.

Alexandra Ziff, the account manager at OnBrand who facilitates The Brewery's marketing, said: "We work with The Brewery to support their creative initiatives and events. In the year that they have been our client, we have come up with some great events to increase footfall and bring in a community feel.

"We work with many schemes who are constantly evolving their events and store offerings to bring in a creative and unique feel. Having elements such as an art trail or teaming up with a local football club as its sponsor, are all ways to really





make the centre a focal area that people want to visit.”

And other centres going an extra mile include McArthur Glen Designer Outlet in Ashford. Seeing the need to add some fun and kindness back into their community, the scheme, assisted by OnBrand, created a ‘random acts of kindness day.’

Six ‘brand ambassadors’ were placed in the centre to meet and greet and offer random acts of kindness throughout the day and evening. Each ambassador had a £200 gift card to randomly treat shoppers with by offering to buy gifts for them. The day ended with visitors receiving their child’s first pair of shoes, or their family evening meal, completely free of charge.

“Kindness goes a long way for a centre with a great local community,” adds Emma Thompson, head of marketing solutions at OnBrand. “We know from extensive work with schemes that community is important, and as they strive to bring in footfall and create a family destination brand, we know that creativity is a big driving point.

“It’s clear that this is the approach for the high street moving forward and we look forward to seeing other great creative events stemming from this need.”