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TALK DIGI TO ME

Story: Shruthi Nair

Deep-dive into Majid Al Futtaim's integration of artificial intelligence and automation in retail that could revolutionise the sector



Majid Al Futtaim recently opened the region's first AI-powered check-out free Carrefour City+ store in the Mall of the Emirates. The new convenience store provides a fast, seamless and contactless experience using 97 AI/ML cameras and cutting-edge scan-and-go technologies in the store. A first for Carrefour worldwide, City+ deploys artificial intelligence to identify thousands of products with pinpoint accuracy, improving inventory management and simplifying shopping for customers.

The store stocks over 1,300 items including snacks, beverages, packaged food and food-to-go meals as well as basic essentials. Store access and shopping payment is enabled via the current MAF Carrefour App. Once inside Carrefour City+, every item picked up by customers will then be automatically added to a digital shopping basket and the purchase will be completed by simply walking out.

Similar to Amazon Go's convenience store, City+ is equipped with a suite of cameras mounted in the ceiling that are powered by a

combination of computer vision and machine learning to follow a shopper's movement inside the store. These cameras use accurate tracking technology to identify shoppers through their body structure, and do not record any facial recognition or biometric data.

On account of this, we speak to Majid Al Futtaim's Chief Digital Officer, Nalla Kaunanithy on how emerging technologies and automation are going to take over the retail landscape.



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UAE'S F&B TO TURN A CORNER

Returning tourists and improving consumer confidence will largely drive strong growth over 2022-2023, according to JLL's new F&B report.

The food and beverage (F&B) sector is primed for growth in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi over the coming years, according to a new report released by JLL.

The UAE's F&B sector was impacted by measures designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, however, with restrictions in restaurants easing and hotels running at full capacity, the industry is now

ready for rapid recovery, says the JLL report.

"The recovery in the UAE's F&B sector is predicated on a combination of factors, including higher levels of overseas visitors due to travel restrictions continuing to ease globally, through to improving consumer confidence among the resident population which has been helped by the success of the country's

vaccine roll-out," said Alexis Marcoux-Varvatsoulis, Foodservice Consulting Lead at JLL MENA, who today released the report at the Arabian & African Hospitality Investment Conference (AHIC) in Dubai.

"While we anticipate that demand for F&B will increase across the UAE, this does not necessarily mean that there will be a need for more

COVER STORY

TOYS R IN: REVIVAL OF THE TOYS RETAIL MARKET

Story: *Shruthi Nair*



After returning from World War 2, a man decided to go into business, so he rented his father's former bicycle-repair shop on the ground floor of his house. However, instead of selling bikes, he decided to sell baby products, and the timing couldn't have been better. As a result of the postwar baby boom, his business grew multifold. Soon he started getting demands for toys along with the baby products, and in the process realised that the customers who bought toys returned for more, compared to the ones who bought cribs and baby chairs. And so, he decided to venture into the toy business, expanding his shop into an empty supermarket at first and then eventually in 1957 opening a second supermarket with a brand name, which then became the first retailer to mass-merchandise toys at across-the-board discount prices, became a household name around the globe, and was one of the most successful retail businesses of all time.

CELEBRATING RETAIL EXCELLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The annual Images RetailME Awards, held alongside Middle East Retail Forum (MRF), will recognize the achievements of retailers from the region who have had the courage to think out-of-the-box to bring innovative retail concepts and experiences equipped with emerging technologies and data that the world has access to today. Those that have managed to elevate the retail offerings both individually and collectively, adopted digitization and advanced processes to deliver unimaginable outcomes, and have shifted their mindsets to reimagine values, goals, and orientations stand a strong chance at emerging as winners.

Images RetailME Awards aims to serve as a benchmark in the Middle Eastern retail industry by honouring best practices and efforts of the retail fraternity, which serves as a massive contributor to the overall economy. The categories have been carefully designed to ensure equal opportunities to all verticals across the board.

The 2021 entries for Images RetailME Awards are now open. Scan the QR code at the bottom of the page to nominate now.

RETAILME AWARDS 2021 CATEGORIES

Most Admired
**Retail
Transformation**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Brand
Campaign**
of the Year

Most Admired
**E-commerce
Retailer**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Omnichannel
Retailer**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Customer Service
Initiative**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Store
Design**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Store
Manager**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Responsible
Retailer**
of the Year

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year:
Fashion

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year:
**Footwear &
Accessories**

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year:
**Children's
Wear**

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year:
**Beauty &
Wellness**

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year:
**Pharmacy &
Healthcare**

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year:
**Home &
Housewares**

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year:
**Food &
Grocery**

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year
Food Service

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year
**Leisure &
Entertainment**

Most Admired
Retailer
of the Year:
Cinema

Most Admired
**In-store
innovation**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Online Retail
Innovation**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Retail
Concept**
of the Year

Most Admired
Collaboration
of the Year

Most Admired
**Cloud Kitchen
Concept**
of the Year

Most Admired
**Food Service
Operator
(Resilience)**
of the year

Most Admired
**Department
Store**
of the year

Most admired
**Retail
Company**
of the year

Most admired
**Retail
Personality**
of the year



A BIG DEAL!

Story: *Shruthi Nair*

Dubai Outlet Mall's evolution to transcend the price paradigm



Shopping is undoubtedly a go-to entertainment option for a lot of residents in Dubai. And if items of choice can be purchased for an incredible value, huge discounts and attractive deals, then it would be cherry on the cake, wouldn't it? Dubai Outlet Mall happens to be just that perfect cake.

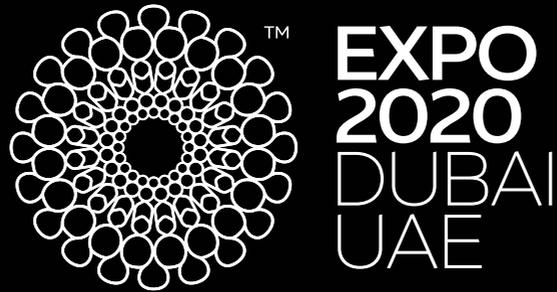
The region's first outlet concept, which is home to over 1,300 of the world's most premium brands, over 240 stores and offers products at rates that are 30% to 90% lesser than its original selling price, is all set to expand and become the largest outlet mall in the world.

"During these turbulent times we were the only mall with over 95% occupancy. With the extension of the mall, we aim to offer retailers an honest platform for doing business. We are over 85% more frequented in terms of footfall compared to pre-Covid levels, considering that around 40% of the footfall earlier were tourists. So now since tourist footfall has reduced, it shows that a lot more of the local residents have started to visit us," said Vishal Mahajan, Director of Dubai Outlet Mall.

But what is an outlet concept and how does it work?

One word – bargains. An outlet store or mall is one where retailers vend products that they aren't currently retailing at fire-sale prices. While this helps retailers liquidate their stocks in the most effective way, customers get to purchase a varied range of high quality products for great values and benefit from offers and discounts all throughout the year.

Historically, consumers have been drawn to discount formats irrespective of the customer service and experience provided by retailers. Today, it is a buyer's market where the customers are more aware of the options at their disposal, their own



Welcoming The World's Greatest Show

Expo 2020 Dubai, the world's greatest show, deemed to be a celebration of human intelligence and achievement, innovation and resilience, inventions and opportunities has taken centre-stage and will see a host of visitors, exhibitors, governments and artists gathering in Dubai from October 2021 to March 2022.

In essence, Expo 2020 is a universal exhibition held under three overarching themes – opportunity, sustainability, and mobility – and will see 192 countries participating over the course of the next six months. Traditionally, the World Expo has been a platform to showcase some of the greatest inventions of the world including television, computers, telephones and even popcorn and Heinz ketchup.

The first World Expo was held in London in 1851 and 170 years later, the 35th one is taking place for the first time in the MENASA (Middle East, North Africa, South Asia) region. Dubai won the election for being the host country on November 27, 2013 during the 154th General Assembly of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) by a resounding majority of 116 out of 164 votes.

Located in the Dubai South district close to the Al Maktoum International Airport, the Expo 2020 site spans over four square kilometres, featuring the Al Wasl Plaza, Mission Possible (opportunity pavilion), Terra (sustainability pavilion), Alif (sustainability pavilion) and the Dubai Exhibition Centre, apart from the individual country pavilions and other attractions.



FUTURE IN FLEXIBILITY

Story: *Shruthi Nair*



The retail landscape is evolving at an unprecedented pace where the roles, functionalities, and purpose of both retail titles (for personnel) and spaces are drastically changing. Aggressive digitization coupled with a global health crisis has accelerated all the transformations that were meant to gradually take over the space.

Elon Musk had once said, “Your will is the most accurate way to predict the future.” The quote holds true across industries and businesses, but especially for retail, as today it isn’t merely about following trends. Retailers are given the opportunity to experiment, innovate, and transform in order to front the retail revolution that is taking place today.

In order to do that, it is paramount to understand customer demands, cater to their needs and desires even before they realise it, and provide an experience that is convenient, seamless, and amazes them every step of the way. One such retailer that has been taking the lead in this respect is Migros, the largest retail company in Switzerland. Recently it announced the opening of its all-in-



one fresh food market, BRIDGE, which has been conceived as the connector between a diverse fresh food market, an experiential dining avenue, and a venue for a wide range of events.

One of the key elements that brings Migros’ vision for a futuristic store to life is how the design promotes a smooth and easy functionality. The Italian design & shopfitting company Interstore | Schweitzer has created and implemented this 2000 m² concept

revolving around one philosophy – flexibility.

“Migros wanted to create this space as a ‘forever prototype store’, where they see this place as an area to test and learn on an ongoing basis. It is a location that is there to inspire innovation and new thinking for their entire network of stores - almost like a testing ground for new ideas,” said Nathan Watts, Creative Director at Interstore | Schweitzer.

INTEGRATED BUSINESS PLANNING AT

PUMA



Story: *Shruthi Nair*

PUMA has transformed end-to-end budgeting, planning, and forecasting to effectively manage supply and demand using Board technology.

Sports lifestyle is a dynamic business. Great things are demanded of the industry and the challenge is to have the right products at the right time to meet that demand instantly.

Things were no different for PUMA and its CEO, along with the senior management team, identified numerous operational challenges for the company. Overcoming these challenges required the evaluation of new technological solutions to increase visibility and integration and reduce complexity.

Prior to PUMA's transformation with Board, the company faced an extremely complex business setup, which had given rise to a plethora of ERP systems, spreadsheets, and other fragmented tools, whose results had to be consolidated at the HQ level. The digital transformation was initiated, with the aim of bringing in a fully integrated planning process to instill the flexibility the company was missing.

One of the most fundamental requirements for PUMA's transformation was comprehensive standardization in planning, reporting, and analytics processes, which would allow the global organization to effectively collaborate across all departments.

After an extensive assessment of the market, PUMA chose Board, the unified decision-making platform, due to the software's striking level of technological flexibility. Within the same all-in-one Business Intelligence, Planning, and Predictive Analytics environment, Board seamlessly combines data control and management, enabling the execution of reporting, analytics, and simulation on the same sets of data and with the highest level of flexibility.

Over 2,500 employees from various departments now use the Board platform to plan the entire wholesale business and the approx. 100,000 SKUs handled every six months.

PUMA began the implementation of its integrated planning process from the target setting stage. This was followed by the Merchandise Plan, which is looked after by PUMA's Global merchandising teams. Based on the numbers coming out of the strategic plan for the relevant year, these teams focus on a specific season and take into account inline/non-inline products, age groups, and gender split.

Next, PUMA's process continues with Conceptual Assortment Planning (CAP). Through an output screen developed within the interactive Board environment, these Business Units can check their tasks and seamlessly collaborate with the merchandising phase while remaining aware of business targets.

Once completed, next is the Range Plan. It allows management teams to evaluate the effectiveness of their ranges against the original plan and budget.



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