

How Place Making can put more money in your till

Your prosperity is directly linked to 'the vibe' or 'sense of place' in your street

The prosperity of your business is directly related to how many people are in your street. And that depends on 'the vibe' in the street or 'sense of place'. Armed with the right information, you and your fellow merchants can create a vibrant sense of place that will show dividends in your till.

What is place making? Just as home making turns a house into a home, place making turns a shopping street into a place. It makes people 'feel at home'. How much people feel at home determines how often they come to your street, how long they will stay, and hence how much they spend.

Now if you think about a house where you instantly feel at home, it probably has nothing to do with how much money the home maker spent on design and furniture. They have furnished the space with their personality, creativity, and a generous spirit.

Here are eight principles for building a sense of place in your shopping street, and some practical actions you can take.

1. Enrich the 'total experience package'

Think of a great experience you had in a street somewhere, maybe as a tourist. You may have stopped to watch a busker, enjoyed some people watching while drinking a beer, marvelled at some art in a museum, bought a memento, and exchanged stories with some locals. For you the experience is a seamless whole, a 'total experience package'. Purchasing goods and services from merchants was an *integral part of your overall experience*. The richer this total experience package, the longer you are likely to spend in the space and the more money you are likely to spend.

Build the *quality* and *diversity* of the experience package on offer in your street and you will see the dividends in your till.

- Make people feel more at home in your shop.
- Make people feel more at home in your street.
- Become a character not just a merchant. Share your passions, hobbies, and life experiences with visitors.

2. Fix things that reduce quality of experience

It is often very small things that detract from the quality of a visitor's experience. Take civic pride and fix it.

- Clean your shop-front.
- Adopt a section of street and keep it clean.
- Adopt a garden and keep it free of weeds.



3. Slow people flow

People are the life-blood of place. Density of people-activity is a key attracter to a place.

Here is a secret to making a space twice as full of people — without needing to attract one extra customer. Get people to take twice as long to move through the space and that space will be twice as full of people. You can help seduce people into spending more time in your street.

- Create an 'activity node' outside your business (or elsewhere in the street): dog drinking bowl, chess set, seat, music, or something children engage with.
- Put merchandise outside your store. Create an engaging window display. Extend your business into the street.
- Sit outside your shop when you have no customers.
- Encourage more street merchants.
- Provide services for those who linger, for example a bench for elderly people or power outlet for the busker.
- Work with those who linger but are considered anti-social. Talk to them face-to-face and find a way for them to add to the vibrancy of the space rather than detracting.

4. Shift focus from the intentional shopper

There are five groups of people in your shopping street.

1. Intentional shoppers - people who have a shopping list or clear economic-exchange intentions.
2. Leisure shoppers - people who do not have clear economic-exchange intentions and shop as a form of recreation.
3. Social and cultural visitors - people who come to the street to do some people watching, be around people, and partake in the social, cultural and civic life of the space.
4. Tourists.
5. People passing through the space to go someplace else.



Traditionally, merchants focus on the intentional shoppers. However, intentional shoppers actually add very little to the vitality of the street. They dash in and dash out. Whereas the social and cultural visitor, leisure shopper or tourist may stay for several hours contributing 30, 40 or even a 100 times more vitality to the street than the intentional shopper. They may also wind up spending more money than the intentional shopper. Even those moving through the space, going someplace else, are part of the potential customer base for merchants. The slower they are moving, the more likely they will buy something spontaneously.

What is it that attracts leisure shoppers, social and cultural visitors and the tourists to a particular street? It is the quality of the *total experience* on offer. By focusing primarily on these three sectors, you will automatically look after your intentional shopper. Intentional shoppers are more likely to choose your shopping street over another if the potential for a memorable experience is greater, and if it is full of people.

- Step outside your shop and wear different hats. See the street through the eyes of elderly people, children, mothers with babies, a leisure shopper, a tourist.
- Identify what reduces the quality of experience for these people. Identify the opportunities to enrich the experience for all the people who visit your street.
- Take one small action that will improve the quality of experience for these people.

5. Service & civility

There is one thing guaranteed to create a memorable experience for visitors to your street: world-class service and acts of civility.

- Train staff to deliver world-class service. Add some pizzazz!
- Value-add to the products you sell – for example, a smile, or a chair for the husband to sit on while his wife tries on the dresses (or better still, a voucher for a free coffee at the coffee-shop next door.)
- Be generous to all visitors, not just your customers. Look after visitors' creature comforts – make your toilet available to all people (make it the funkiest toilet in the street); share tourist information for free; or recommend another shop if they have a product that meets your customers needs better than what you have to offer.

6. Surprise, humour and the quirky

What in your street will bring a smile to people's face? What will delight a child? What is there to stimulate the senses?

- Put something quirky in your window, or on the footpath. Move it around in your store to keep people guessing. Or change the item once a week.
- Have quirky items that move around in your street.
- Create a joke board.
- Dress up. Be eccentric.
- Stimulate the senses. Plant a garden. Have coffee brewing.

7. Authentic experiences

Part of feeling at home in someone's house is that you partake in the authentic life of the home maker. Think what it is that makes you unique, your business unique, your shopping street unique, your neighbourhood unique. Build the experience you offer visitors around the things that make you and your shopping street unique. Give people an authentic experience.

- Put your hobbies and passions on display in your shop. Become a 'character' not just a 'merchant'.
- Celebrate the history and achievements of your neighbourhood.
- Organise a festival.



8. Cooperate, don't compete

Merchants often think the other business owners are their competition. But if every shop in your street went broke, and you were the last one standing, you would not be making more money. Your success is intimately tied to the success of every other business in the street. If all the merchants work together in creating a memorable experience for the visitors to your street, you all benefit.

- Form alliances with other businesses to deliver a richer experience for your customers. Form a circuit.
- Hold conversations with your fellow merchants and explore ways to work together in creating a richer experience for visitors. Focus on what you as merchants can do, not on what the city or other authorities must do.