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Retailing in Resort Communities *Designing Shopping for Today's Visitors*

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Shopping is a significant part of tourism. Wisconsin Department of Tourism research indicates that shopping is one of the most popular activities among our visitors. Approximately 25% of Wisconsin traveler expenditures are spent on retail goods, more than lodging and transportation combined.

For a community to effectively capture its share of visitor spending, it must balance natural, historic and cultural resources with the right mix of manufactured attractions including retail. A recent article in [Urban Land](#)/¹ provides ideas from successful retail centers located in major North American resort communities.

Successful tourist-based retail centers have some similar characteristics. They typically:

- provide an intimate, distinct atmosphere and a strong pedestrian character;
- offer an experience and increase the lifestyle appeal of the community;
- have distinctive and consistent architectural design, (perhaps based on a historic theme);
- offer a variety of eating and drinking places that create a social ambiance;
- lack traditional anchor tenants;
- include logo or merchandise shops with memorative or iconic appeal; and
- offer ongoing special events and activities.

Finding the right mix of businesses to compliment these retail centers is difficult as

tourism and retail are both sensitive to changing consumer, economic and social trends.

Six principles can help identify the right mix of services, facilities and tenants in a tourist-based retail center:

1. The Retail Center Should Build on the Attributes of the Surrounding Area: Tourism destinations depend on the special attributes of their locations. These attributes might include unique natural attractions such as a spectacular river or lake front setting. They can also include unique historic and cultural characteristics of the community. The retail center should build on these special attributes to achieve a unified and authentic theme that complements the surrounding area.

2. Have a Year-Round and Diverse Appeal: Successful tourism related retailers appeal to more than one market segment. They look at the various types of visitors by season to identify opportunities to increase year-round sales. For example, a shop that sells and services bicycles in the summer may be able to sell ski equipment in the winter. Successful retailers also try to appeal to a diverse mix of customers including overnight visitors, day trippers, conference attendees, local residents and employees.

3. Cluster Retail Near Town Center: The appeal of tourism-based retail is increased when a wide variety of shops are clustered around each

¹ Drawn from: Matheusik, Mick, "Resort Retailing: Finding the Right Mix", *Urban Land*, August 1996, page 68

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other and near local services. Local services can include visitor information, post office, library, medical center, banks, realtors, conference and lodging facilities. These services provide spin-off for local retailers and build a sense of community.

4. Retail Mix: The mix of retail, restaurants and entertainment should reflect the needs and interests of the primary market segments. Today's tourist destinations provide a variety of retail and services beyond souvenirs and fast food. Consider the following examples of specialty retailers found in resort communities:

Examples of Tourism-Based Specialty Retail	
<i>cheese</i>	<i>liquor and wines</i>
<i>skin and health care</i>	<i>perfumes/soaps</i>
<i>jewelry</i>	<i>lifestyle apparel</i>
<i>golf/sports/outdoor Equip.</i>	<i>novelty gifts</i>
<i>antiques</i>	<i>home accessories</i>
<i>theme/historic restaurant</i>	<i>coffee shop</i>
<i>high-tech entertainment</i>	<i>bakery products/cookies</i>
<i>chocolates/candy</i>	<i>Heritage/Ethnic gifts</i>
<i>art gallery</i>	<i>crafts</i>
<i>T-shirts and clothing</i>	<i>gourmet foods</i>
<i>books</i>	<i>photography</i>
<i>factory outlet products</i>	<i>Christmas items</i>
<i>flowers</i>	<i>toys</i>
<i>wildlife art</i>	<i>cards</i>

In addition, general merchandise stores that sell drugs, groceries, hardware and convenience items are also important in servicing visitors.

5. The Right Products: Many resort retailers sell products related to health, wellness and feeling good. Such products include small indulgences such as specialty coffees, ice cream, cookies and chocolate, toys as well as outdoor accessories such as sunglasses, sweaters and footwear. Locally produced products are also appealing to tourists. Retailers should adjust their merchandise seasonally and carry products that also appeal to the local resident market.

6. Appearance of the Retail District:

Appearance of the retail district can strengthen the area's identity and sales. Consistency in signage, shopfronts and merchandising can be achieved through the following:

- landscaping (and street-scaping) to clearly define the retail area;
- building size;
- pedestrian orientation;
- signs and icons reflecting local cultural, natural, recreational or historical features;
- mobile kiosks;
- colorful storefronts/facades with inviting window displays, entrances, awnings, umbrellas, banners and signage; and
- outdoor entertainment.

Retailers should try to stimulate impulse shopping, even for things that the visitor could buy back home. However, it is important not to look too commercial.

Considerations for the Future: The six principals discussed will continue to be important as we prepare for continued changes in tourism and retailing. Retail developers and operators should monitor consumer trends and:

- recognize that non-essential shopping is recreation for many tourists;
- create synergy with other retailers;
- offer convenience and lifestyle goods;
- develop a consistent marketing theme;
- build on local historical, cultural and educational elements;
- work with other retailers on promotions, displays and merchandising; and
- harmonize buildings and storefronts with the surroundings.

As shopping continues to be an important activity for Wisconsin visitors, entrepreneurs and community leaders should understand the opportunities and challenges of tourist-based retail in their business districts. While the principles presented were drawn from major North American resorts, many of the ideas can be applied here in Wisconsin