

EDITORIAL

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Tricky balancing act in mixed developments

Property managers must not compromise the needs of one interest group while trying to tackle problems of another

*By Jordan Neo,
Managing Director of
Knight Frank Estate Management*

ANY type of development, be it residential, commercial or retail, has its own distinct features, needs and requirements. By virtue of varied characteristics, a different property management approach needs to be adopted for each type of use. Mixed developments, in particular, pose a challenge because of the conflicting demands of users.

ACCESS/SECURITY

Property managers are responsible for ensuring a high level of security in the apartments they manage. However if an apartment is part of a mixed development with a retail podium, the residents' need for privacy may be in conflict with retailers' desire for pedestrian traffic. In such cases, even an experienced property manager may not have a magical 'please all' solution.

Nevertheless, he needs to consciously attempt to find a solution which addresses the needs of the different users of the development. For instance, he may have to come up with a creative way to stimulate maximum pedestrian traffic for the retail podium, but control visitor access to apartments. In some mixed developments, the entrance lobby of the residential component is located outside the retail podium so that residents have direct access to the apartments.

However, in older buildings, where the fire access stairs commonly serves both the apartments and retail podium, it is difficult to prevent visitors from wandering up to the apartments through these stairs. Where there are serious security concerns, it might be a good idea to install outward doors, which prevent shoppers from entering the

apartment block but permits residents to enter the retail podium. However such measures may require additional security personnel.

Property managers should also ensure that they do not compromise the needs of one interest group while trying to resolve the problem of another group. In newer developments, the residential and retail components may have been designed such that each component has its own car park, lobby and entrance. Such features would greatly improve the security for its residents without compromising on customer flow to the retail podium.

INCONVENIENCE VS BUSINESS TRAFFIC

In some estates, the congregation of foreign workers may be perceived by residents as undesirable. But the existence of such social groups may help to revitalise business for the retail occupants. Not surprisingly, those who benefit may adopt a more accommodating attitude. As such, property managers may be placed in an awkward position. The situation is complicated if the council members of the estate do not have consensus as to what is best for the estate. If the deadlock cannot be resolved, the matter should be thoroughly debated at a properly convened AGM, so that a well crafted set of bylaws reflecting the desires of the owners can be passed and enforced.

FAIR FUND ALLOCATION

The office and retail components of a mixed development are generally allotted higher share values than the residential. This does reflect their higher and more intensive usage of the facilities and common property. An often cited observation is that conflicts often arise when the residential

— con't on page 2

users plan to implement major improvement works such as upgrading of the security system, improvement of the children's playground and so on. The perception by owners of the retail or office component is that they are paying for an additional facility for the enjoyment of residents. Rightfully, they should view such works as an investment to enhance the value of the entire development

UNFAIR USE OF COMMON PROPERTY

In some estates, by virtue of their layout and space constraints, there may be traffic congestion on the service road due to illegal parking by shoppers. Such illegal parking may inconvenience residents. On the other hand, retailers may perceive strict enforcement actions by the property manager as unhelpful, as it chases away their shoppers. In other cases, shoppers may encroach onto parking space reserved for residents causing much unhappiness. Sometimes disputes arise out of whether to charge occupiers for the usage of parking space.

UNDESIRABLE BUSINESSES

In some retail malls, complaints by residents may actually be focused on the nature of the businesses in the development. Illegal games and billiard saloons are of particular concern to parents who worry about the bad influence on their children. Businesses such as discos and pubs may increase security risk or cause unhappiness among residents who want to have peace. It is important to note that unless an occupier's business is regarded as illegal in the eyes of the law, it is not within the purview of the Land Titles Strata Act (LTSA), for a property manager to interfere with its activities.

CONCLUSION

Mixed developments pose significant challenges to property managers. Apart from ensuring that the managers involved are sensitive to the needs and expectations of all its occupiers, a clearer set of bylaws should be developed so that all parties are clear about their rights and obligations. An experienced property manager can help to identify and overcome conflicts, which are due to design and layout constraints. This could be resolved or alleviated if designs or layout could be improved.

Having Clean Public Toilets Is Everyone's Business

Toilets, like it or not, is one of the places that we have to visit for the rest of our lives, from the time we learn to walk. Toilets are part of our lives. According to the Restroom Association of Singapore (RAS) a normal person visits the toilet 6-8 times a day and this works out to 2190-2920 times a year, or an average of 2200 times a year. It is equivalent to spending three years of our lives in this place called "toilet".



The outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003 underscored the importance of hygiene and health issues viz toilets. "SARS may be spread through touch, urine and faeces.leaking sewage has been linked to Hong Kong's biggest SARS outbreak, in which 321 people living in 15 blocks in the Amoy Gardens high-rise housing estate, fell sick in March and April last year" (The New Paper, 8 May 2004).

REMAINING HAPPY AND HEALTHY

It is increasingly important that toilets not only needs to be cleaned, but also designed to meet

the needs of users. Post-SARS and with the recurring flu virus, the need for cleaner and more hygiene toilets become an even more important issue.

The state of our public restrooms is a subject that can be embarrassing to talk about, yet is of great importance to each of us. Proof of this importance can be gleamed from a national survey of 12,500 Americans taken by IKEA, the Swedish furniture retailer. The survey dealt with reasons for working at home. "By a wide majority, the 12,500 respondents' minds are firmly stuck in the office toilet: Sixty-eight percent listed the appeal of their private privy as the main attraction of working at home, citing everything from dissatisfaction with the office brand of toilet tissue to social discomfort over communal restroom sound effects."



RAS works closely with the Society for Continence Singapore (SFCS). SFCS's executive director Rani Vadiveloo said, "Clean toilets can help in the prevention of Incontinence. For example, if a person frequently holds back urinating just to avoid

dirty toilets, many years later he or she may develop Incontinence.”

GOOD MAINTENANCE

Whether for health or comfort, Jack Sim, RAS president has this to add “We believe that if you give the public a toilet that is well designed and maintained, the users will behave well and be coerced into keeping the place clean. They will also keep coming back. That’s the human psychology, that’s the way people react.”

“Look at our streets. It’s clean. When people want to litter, they think again and say to themselves ‘what a shame if I litter when the road is so clean’ and so they look for a bin to throw their litter.”



CORPORATE (AND BUILDING) IMAGE

Keeping toilets clean is more than just adopting good public hygiene practices. Clean toilets have also got to do with corporate image. It is also a customer service. It attracts customers too.

No doubt building owners or facility managers recognize that one of the smallest room in the building commands attention that is in proportionally larger than other places in a building.

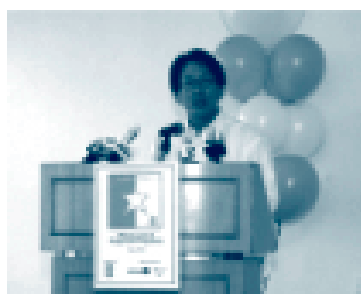


Under the Happy Toilet Programme, RAS has recognized and rewarded good toilet design, cleanliness and maintenance of public toilets. Recently, it held a Happy Toilet

Seminar – based on the same principles of the programme – with the Federation of Merchant Association. The aim was getting eating places to upgrade and maintain their premises’ public toilets properly.

HAPPY TOILET PRINCIPLES

The principles Happy Toilet Programme (HTP) can be applied to other premises like shopping centres, commercial buildings and hospitals etc., just as it did for coffee shops. It also adopts a holistic approach from the users’ perspective that is HTP.



Mr. Lim Swee Say, Minister of the Environment, at the launch of the Happy Toilet Programme, on 1 July 2003

A set of criteria and benchmarking against the best standards are the cornerstones of HTP. For the standards, a 3 Stars means Good and Clean Restrooms i.e. Excellence

in terms of provisions and conditions of restrooms; a 4 Stars means Excellent Restrooms i.e. Excellence in terms of provisions, conditions, system of maintenance and comfort level and 5 Stars means Excellent (Exclusive) Restrooms i.e. Excellence in terms of provisions, conditions, system of maintenance, comfort level, special delights and user-friendliness.

- **What are ‘Provisions & Conditions’?**

Briefly, they refer to Clear Signage, Clean & Dust Free Door, Dry & Litter Free Vanity Top, Functional & Clean Taps etc.

- **What are ‘System of Maintenance’?**

Briefly, they refer to Optimised Cleaning Schedule; Trained Cleaner e.g. NSRS; Good Toilet Layout; General Ventilation etc.

- **What are ‘Special Delights’?**

Briefly they refer to Modesty Boards for Urinals, Ledge for placing belongings, Diaper Changing Station, Fully functional Handicapped Toilet for the Disabled etc.

The programme is ongoing, and RAS has also started working with designers and facility managers at blueprint level i.e. RAS will advise on what makes a 5 Star toilet ‘from scratch’. This is in addition to the existing public toilets it audits. More information can be found at www.toilet.org.sg

Integrating the Internet

A look at how the Internet has changed the face of facilities management.

By Christine Lay,

Corporate Affairs Executive of

Colliers International Asset Management

It has been a very rough day. You have failed to close that latest deal and the bosses and clients alike seemed to be in a foul mood for the entire afternoon. Plus you've got tons of unfinished work that needs to be done; guess you will have to put in some overtime tonight.

The sudden silence underlying the hustle and bustle of your colleagues getting ready to go off tells you that the central air-conditioning system has been turned off. Taking off your jacket and rolling up your sleeves, you can feel the heat from outside encroaching into the building. Groaning inwardly, you shudder at the thought of having to climb down six flights of stairs later as the elevator is switched off at 10pm daily.

Owners of buildings such as the one described above would do well to employ a professional facility management company to assist them in realising the true potential of their building. Buildings can now be upgraded into "intelligent buildings", where problems like those described would be a thing in the past. Best of all, upgrading in the long run would result in cost savings.

If you were to work in an intelligent building and have to stay late in order to finish a project, all you have to do is log on to the facility management website and fill in a service request to inform the management to extend the air-conditioning services. This way you can still work in cool comfort into the night. There is also no need to worry about the elevators as they are electronically controlled and at least two will still be working throughout the evening.

BUILDING INTELLIGENCE

As author and President of Energy Control Inc., an Energy Service Company and System Integrator, John J. "Jack" McGowan noted in his recent article 'The Internet Ties it All Together', "In the 1980's the topic of intelligent buildings was popular, yet it was not until recently that technology to accomplish many of these functions was available."

One of these technologies available is Internet Protocol access (IP access). IP access products meet the challenge of convergence, bringing equipment of various ages and protocols onto one common IP network for simple access from any location on the network. This enables equipment like CCTV cameras, badge card readers, HVAC controllers and formerly stand-alone (not able to connect to a modern network) serial equipment to communicate over an Ethernet LAN or other IP network.

The Internet is not just used to connect existing equipment and systems together however. In an enactment of Swedish handphone company Nokia's tagline of "connecting people", local facility management company Colliers International Asset Management (CIAM) has provided each of their clients with a unique Customised Community Portal.

The portal provides access into a customised and web based Service Information and Management System, where the client can file their service requests, track the progress of Work Orders, email CIAM's 24 hour Contact Centre, view real-time data and reporting for their facilities and overall gain greater control over their real estate management.

ADVANTAGES OF THE INTERNET

Through the use of the Internet, facility managers are able to automate and monitor

complex mechanical and electrical systems scattered throughout a building. For example, the air-conditioning system on every level in Thong Teck Building, a commercial building managed by CIAM, is monitored in real-time using the Internet. This saves the facility manager the hassle of having to physically go to different floors. Sub-contractors can connect to the automation system in a building via the Internet so that he can see what the problems are before making his way to the site. Time wastage is cut down and the problem will be solved faster as the contractor will be able to diagnose the problem on the spot and bring down the correct replacement parts.

Building occupiers also benefit from the Internet run system; service requests can be made via the system to the building managers. Perhaps someone needs the air-conditioning hours to be extended beyond office hours. The request will be sent and noted down, with the accounts department subsequently retrieving the data and billing the occupier accordingly for the additional hours.

The Internet also helps cut down queues at the management office in condominium projects through the incarnation of online facility booking. For example, residents from the condominium estates like Seasons Park and Northvale simply log onto the condominium website, which was designed and managed by CIAM, and place their bookings for facilities such as tennis courts, barbeque pits, function room and so on. They can also use the website to email service requests directly to the facility manager.

Industry watchers agree that the Internet is the engine of energy and security convergence in the buildings of today and tomorrow. The challenge is to adopt technologies that will integrate internet protocol cost-effectively and seamlessly with existing equipment and systems. Facilities professionals must also find technologies that can be easily implemented and maintained, without compromising existing infrastructure.

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About the Author

CHOW KOK FONG currently practises as an arbitrator and mediator of construction and real estate disputes as well as an advisor to leading U.S. and Japanese multinational companies. He is concurrently an Associate Professor (Adj) at the National University of Singapore. Prior to this, he was Director of Projects with City Developments Ltd and Managing Director (International) with Capitaland Commercial Ltd. Mr Chow was also previously the Chief Executive of the Construction Industry Development Board (now the Building and Construction Authority) and has undertaken consulting work as a construction industry specialist with the World Bank. In 1995, he was among a group of professionals who founded the Society of Project Managers and became its Founder President.

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