



THE MALL REVENUE ENGINE

HOW SMART MALLS TURN FOOT TRAFFIC INTO SALES





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INTRODUCTION

MALLS AREN'T DEAD. THEY'RE EVOLVING.

There's a common misconception that has been making its rounds in the retail sector: "Malls are dead."

On the contrary, malls are having a resurgence since slowing during the peak of the Covid pandemic. A recent report from Capital One Shopping showed a 12% increase in foot traffic at the busiest malls between 2019 and 2022. The same study reports that 73% of Gen Z consumers visit a mall at least once per month, and 82% go to socialize.

Not online, and not through an app. In person, inside a building, with a card or a phone and an intention to spend. While e-commerce has undoubtedly reshaped expectations, compressed delivery windows, and trained an entire generation to comparison-shop on the escalator, the physical store—and by extension, the mall—is still where most retail revenue is made.

80% of shopping still happens in physical stores.

— Deloitte



But physical advantage doesn't convert to revenue automatically. Foot traffic is fragile, as is loyalty. The malls that are pulling ahead aren't necessarily newer or better located. They're the ones that have figured out that the visit itself is the product, and they've invested in tools that actively shape what happens during it.

This guide makes the case for an approach built on a tool most operators have systematically underestimated: the digital map.

When a digital map layer is built and deployed correctly, it acts as the connective tissue between a shopper's intent and a mall's revenue. It gets shoppers where they're going, while surfacing the right stores at the right moment. It creates a monetizable media channel inside the venue. And, perhaps most essential, it generates the behavioral data that proves all of it.

This guide explores how mall management and operators can transform their venue into a revenue center using the digital map as essential infrastructure. In it, we'll break down the structural problem with the traditional mall model, the three commercial jobs a smart map layer does, and the analytics framework that closes the loop back to revenue.



THE TRADITIONAL MALL MODEL ISN'T WORKING ANYMORE.

THE ANCHOR TENANT STRATEGY WORKED FOR DECADES. THEN THE ANCHORS STARTED CLOSING.

For most of mall retail's history, the revenue logic was elegant in its simplicity. Two or three major draws—a department store, a cinema, a large-format grocer—would be placed at opposite ends of the building. The traffic they generate would then spill into the common corridors in between, blossoming into foot traffic for inline tenants.

That model had one critical assumption baked in: passive discovery would work. Shoppers would wander, they'd find things, and then they'd spend.

But now, that assumption is under pressure from three directions at once.



1. Anchor Erosion

The department stores that anchored the passive traffic model have been closing at scale for over a decade. The traffic generation logic those closures created—a gravitational pull that moved shoppers from one end of the center to the other—can't be replicated with smaller-format replacements. The old "if you build the anchors, they will come" playbook has fewer and fewer anchors to build around.



2. The online expectation gap

Shoppers arrive with plans already formed. They have pre-visualized their routes on Google Maps, created wishlists synced from brand apps, and bookmarked influencer recommendations from the night before. If the mall isn't part of that pre-visit digital journey, it starts every visit behind. And once a shopper is inside with a plan, anything the venue might have surfaced becomes invisible unless it's delivered through a channel they're already using.



3. Tenant proof pressure

Lease conversations have changed. Tenants increasingly want proof that the center is actively working on their behalf—not just providing square footage, but actively driving traffic to their doors. Aggregate foot counts don't go far enough to answer that question for many tenants today. Those who are winning in today's environment are the ones at venues where the operator can show with data how many people were directed to their store this quarter.

The industry knows it needs to respond. Mall operators are prepared to take steps in technology updates to serve this new shopper landscape. What isn't as clear as what specifically to invest in to make the biggest impact on revenue.

4 in 10 retail executives plan to reinvest in store experiences from remodels to technology upgrades to attract more in-store traffic.

— Deloitte



The operators moving fastest are the ones investing in tools that let them control and measure what happens once a visitor walks in. It's clear from the data that malls don't lack visitors, despite the declarations of "dead malls". What they do lack, however, is visibility into what those visitors do once they're inside. Without visibility, optimization is guesswork and revenue is left to chance.

Visitor expectations now come down to one core factor: time. If consumers have time, malls need to deliver experience—a true third space with strong tenants, energy, and reasons to stay. If they don't, malls need to deliver convenience. Fast, seamless 'get in, get out' transactions with zero friction.

— **David-James Nguyen, Global Head of Malls, Liven**



And mall leaders already know: different visitors arrive in different modes. Some with an afternoon to spend, some with twelve minutes before school pickup. The digital tools that serve a mall best are the ones that flex for both. That's precisely what a well-built map layer does.



THE REVENUE ASSET HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

HOW THE DIGITAL MAP LAYER EVOLVED FROM WAYFINDING TO A SHOPPER BEHAVIOR AND REVENUE PLATFORM.

Saying a digital map is for navigation is like saying a smartphone is for making calls. The description is accurate, yet wildly incomplete.

A digital map has the potential to be a shopper behavior platform, a property operations platform, a marketing platform, and a security platform—all wrapped in one.

Every time a shopper opens it, they're telling you something: where they are, what they're looking for, how they're oriented in the venue, and what they might do next. That's a rich, real-time signal, yet most venues are ignoring it entirely.

There's a generational dimension to this that makes urgency harder to avoid. The majority of Gen Z and millennials say they appreciate when brands add digital touchpoints to enhance physical shopping experiences. They're actively asking physical venues to meet them where they already live—on their phones, in the moment, with relevant information that makes the visit better.

78% of Gen Z and millennials say they appreciate when brands add digital touchpoints to enhance physical shopping experiences.

The Harris Poll & Quad



The good news is that a well-built digital map layer does three distinct commercial jobs at the same time:

Job 1: Wayfinding	Job 2: Discovery	Job 3: Marketing
Getting shoppers to their destination with confidence and reducing friction.	Surfacing relevant stores, promotions, and experiences at the moment of in-venue intent.	Creating an owned, in-venue channel where tenants and brands compete for placement, run promotions, and reach shoppers at their highest-intent moment.
This is the foundation layer, and the minimum viable experience. But done well, it has revenue implications that go beyond convenience.	Turning a directed search into an expanded visit. Converting those open to exploring and ultimately, spending.	Leveraging an in-store channel for when visitors are already inside, exploring, and primed to buy.

Each of these jobs generates data. That data becomes the measurement layer that closes the loop back to revenue—and gives operators the proof points tenants and leadership are asking for.



PILLAR 1

CLEAR WAYFINDING GETS SHOPPERS TO THE SALE.

A shopper who can't find the store can't buy from it.

Navigation failure is both a guest experience inconvenience, as well as a revenue leak. Shoppers who get disoriented don't always stop at a directory kiosk or ask a team member for help.

They make a judgment call: is finding this store worth the effort? Often, the answer is no. They cut the visit short, skip a stop they'd intended to make, and leave with a frustration they'll associate with the venue long after they've forgotten what they were looking for.

Effective digital wayfinding removes the anxiety of the unknown:

- ✓ Parking
- ✓ Step-free routes
- ✓ Wing differentiation
- ✓ Entry
- ✓ Sensory locations
- ✓ Specific store locations on specific levels
- ✓ Floor layouts

When a shopper can move through the venue with confidence, something shifts; they spend less cognitive energy on orientation and more on exploration. That's the conversion that matters.

WHAT SMART WAYFINDING LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

- ✓ Mobile-first maps accessible before and during the visit — so orientation starts before a shopper steps out of the car
- ✓ Turn-by-turn routing from parking level to store entrance, not just floor plan orientation
- ✓ Real-time updates that reflect the actual current state of the venue: temporary closures, pop-up locations, seasonal reconfigurations
- ✓ Accessible routing options for guests with mobility needs — which is both the right thing to do and a differentiator in an era where inclusion is a brand attribute

A 1% increase in dwell time
results in a 1.3% increase in sales.

— **Pathintelligence**



THE LOYAL ANGLE

A first-time visitor who navigates the venue successfully—finds what they came for, orients easily, doesn't get lost—builds a subconscious association between the venue and competence. They came, they found it, it worked. That's the foundation of a return visit.

Loyalty isn't only built through rewards programs and points balances. It's built through frictionless experiences that make people feel like the venue is on their side.

Confident navigation is one of the least discussed, and yet most reliable, loyalty triggers a mall can invest in.



PILLAR 2

DISCOVERY TURNS BROWSERS INTO BUYERS.

While some shoppers arrive with an intended purpose—something they need to buy, or a restaurant they want to try—others arrive open to discover. They want to browse stores, pop in and out, and stumble upon a pop-up event.

The visits that generate the most revenue for the mall and for its tenants are rarely the purely purposeful ones. They're the visits where something unexpected happened. Discovery—not just destination—is where basket size grows.

The challenge is that discovery has historically happened by accident – a shopper wandered past the right window at the right moment, or the right store happened to be on the route between two others.

Smart malls are turning that moment into a curated experience.

“If you can prescribe places or things your visitors may want, you’re helping craft their experience, and more importantly, increasing the chance they will spend more than they planned when they first stepped foot in the venue.”

— **Michael Pasket, VP of Malls, Mappedin**

The digital map layer helps the clear-intent shopper in getting there. But it's also for the open-minded shopper finding things they didn't know they needed—served to them at the precise moment they're most likely to act.

When a shopper searches for a store, the map knows two things simultaneously: where they are, and what they're interested in. That combination is the most valuable signal in retail. Discovery features convert that signal into incremental spend before the shopper ever leaves the building.

DISCOVERY MOMENTS THAT DRIVE REVENUE



Category adjacency prompts

A shopper navigating to a shoe retailer is surfaced a nearby accessories store in the same category. The route is the same, and the stop is additive.



Proximity-based promotions.

A tenant funds an offer that triggers when a shopper enters a defined zone. The shopper didn't come for the deal, but the timing is right and the friction is zero.



New tenant and activation surfacing.

A new brand tenant opens on Level 3. The map flags it to relevant shoppers in real time.



Event-driven wayfinding

Pop-ups, seasonal activations, and experiential moments are surfaced in the map flow so they reach shoppers already in the building, already in a spending mindset, and already mobile.

The Gen Z dimension amplifies the urgency in curated discovery. These younger shoppers are particularly responsive to discovery that feels personal and timely.

They don't experience a relevant in-map recommendation as advertising. They experience it as service. That distinction is worth holding onto: the most effective discovery doesn't interrupt the visit, it improves it.



PILLAR 3

THE DIRECTORY AS A REVENUE CHANNEL.

Every time a shopper opens the mall's digital map, they make a declaration of intent. They're inside the venue and ready to spend. They're high-intent, location-confirmed, and in-venue—one of the most commercially valuable advertising contexts that exists in retail.

Most mall operators are giving it away for free.

The directory on a typical mall app or website is a list. The listing is alphabetical, categorical, and maybe with a search bar. While it tells you where things are in 2D, it doesn't sell anything, promote anything, or serve anything to the shopper beyond raw information.

In a world where every other media surface a shopper touches is actively monetized, the mall's own map is sitting on the sideline. That changes when operators treat the directory as a media channel.

WHAT IN-MAP MONETIZATION LOOKS LIKE



Sponsored search placements

When a shopper searches for “coffee” or “women’s fashion” or “sports,” the tenants who’ve paid for category sponsorship appear at the top of results. The shopper still gets relevant results, and the tenant gets the best shot at capturing that intent.



Featured listings and banner placements

New tenants launching in the center, seasonal campaigns, or brand activations can purchase premium positioning in the directory.



Event and promotion pop-ups

Time-limited overlays tied to a tenant’s marketing calendar like a flash sale, a new collection launch, or an exclusive in-venue event surface to shoppers inside the building at exactly the right moment. The tenant reaches an audience that is physically present and primed to respond.



Anchor tenant integrations

Feature anchor tenants prominently in the map experience to fulfill co-marketing commitments, drive traffic to under-visited wings, or surface time-sensitive offers from flagship retailers.

WHY TENANTS WILL PAY FOR THIS

The lease negotiation has changed. Tenants aren’t just asking for square footage and foot traffic reports. Now, they’re asking for proof that the mall is actively driving traffic to their specific store.

In-map placement is a concrete, measurable answer to that question. It also fundamentally repositions the mall operator: not just as a landlord, but as a media partner with owned distribution inside a high-intent environment.

The revenue model is flexible. Placements can be priced as flat-rate seasonal packages bundled into tenant marketing agreements, CPM-based digital ad

units priced against engagement volume, or tiered sponsorship tiers that give tenants varying levels of category prominence. The pricing structure matters less than the principle: this is inventory the operator already owns, and right now it's unmonetized.

“The strongest bridge between digital and physical is ownership of the customer journey. Imagine a mall app with personalised offers, food ordering ahead of arrival, and built-in rewards. Customers can skip queues, earn mall dollars, and redeem instantly across food, retail, and services. Over time, this builds habit. The customer becomes ‘sticky,’ returning more often because they’re being rewarded every time they spend. That’s what drives measurable increases in foot traffic and basket size.”

— **David-James Nguyen, Global Head of Malls, Liven**

A shopper who discovers a brand through an in-map recommendation, acts on it, and gets rewarded for doing so is a shopper who has a reason to come back. That compounding effect is what separates the tactical use of in-map advertising from its strategic potential.



CLOSING THE LOOP

MEASURING REVENUE IMPACT.

All three pillars described in this guide (wayfinding, discovery, and in-map monetization) share a common output: data. Behavioral, directional, quantifiable data about what shoppers do inside the venue. And that data is where the map layer stops being a guest experience investment and starts being a business intelligence asset.

The measurement gap in most malls today is significant. The vast majority of operators can tell you how many people walked through the door, but very few can tell you which tenants those visitors reached, how long they spent in different zones, which promotions influenced their path through the center, or how navigation behavior correlates with spend.

That gap is where decisions get made on instinct rather than evidence, and where the case for continued digital investment falls apart in front of a CFO. The digital map layer closes that gap.

WHAT BECOMES VISIBLE WHEN THE MAP LAYER IS ACTIVE

Foot traffic flow.

Go beyond visitor counts. See which wings are generating traffic, which are dead zones, which routes shoppers take versus the routes operators assume they take. This data alone can reshape how a center positions its real estate.



Engagement data

What are shoppers actually searching for? Which categories, which tenants, which floor levels see the most map engagement? This intent data is the kind marketers spend significant budget trying to approximate through surveys and focus groups, delivered automatically through normal shopper behavior.



Promotion performance

Did the in-map campaign drive traffic to the featured tenant? By how much, over what period, and compared to the baseline? Attribution that used to be speculative becomes measured.



Dwell time by zone

How long are shoppers staying in different areas of the center? How does that correlate with map tool usage versus non-usage? Which areas benefit most from discovery prompts?



Return visit correlation

Are guests who engage with the map more likely to come back? How does that compare to the broader visitor population? This is the loyalty metric the rewards program was always supposed to answer, and the map can deliver it without requiring a sign-up.

HOW THIS DATA CHANGES THE CONVERSATION



Tenants

It shifts the relationship from anecdote to evidence. Instead of talking about foot traffic in aggregate, operators can show traffic by zone, by day part, by campaign period. Lease renewals anchored in performance data are stickier than those anchored in square footage and gut feel. Tenants who see proof that the center is actively directing shoppers to their door are tenants with a reason to reinvest.



Marketing leadership

It creates attribution that has historically been missing from in-venue campaigns. Operators can show which promotions drove traffic to which tenants and at what volume — turning the map from a cost line into a measurable channel with demonstrable ROI.



Ownership and finance

It reframes the map entirely. Not as infrastructure expense, but as a revenue-generating asset with a performance record. The question shifts from “why are we spending on this?” to “how do we expand it?”

THE FIVE KPIS TO TRACK THROUGH THE DIGITAL MAP

1

Navigation engagement rate

The percentage of visitors who actively use digital wayfinding during their visit. This is the foundation metric, a proxy for how embedded the tool is in the actual visit experience.

2

Discovery interaction rate

The percentage of map sessions that include a click on a discovery prompt, a sponsored result, or a proximity-triggered promotion. This measures whether the map is doing its second job, influencing where they go next.

3

Tenant traffic attribution

Measurable visits to specific tenants driven directly by map navigation or in-map promotion. This is the metric that turns the mall's map into a performance media channel.

4

Dwell time by zone

Average time spent in key areas of the center, tracked over time and segmented by map engagement vs. non-engagement. Dwell time is a leading indicator of spend, and zone-level data reveals where layout or programming changes can unlock it.

5

Return visit correlation

Repeat visit rate among guests who engaged with the map versus the total visitor population. This is the loyalty metric that connects the entire digital map investment to long-term revenue per visitor—the number that ultimately determines whether a shopper is worth acquiring.



REFRAME

THE MAP IS A REVENUE CENTER, NOT A COST CENTER.

The malls that win the next decade won't necessarily be the ones with the most square footage, the most premium anchors, or the biggest marketing budgets.

They'll be the ones that understand their visitors better by serving them in the moment, guiding them through the experience, and proving their value to tenants with data rather than assertions.

The digital map is how that starts. It's the one tool that touches every phase of the visit—before the shopper arrives, the moment they orient inside the building, every discovery moment in between, and the data trail they leave behind. When it's built right and used fully, it does the three jobs that move the revenue needle: removes friction, creates discovery, and monetizes attention.

Most malls are using it for one of those three. The gap between one and three is where the revenue opportunity lives.

THREE TAKEAWAYS



1

Navigation friction is a revenue problem, not just a guest experience one. Every shopper who leaves early or misses a planned store is a dollar figure and a compounding loyalty gap.



2

The digital map layer does three commercial jobs: *wayfinding*, *discovery*, and *in-venue monetization*. Most operators are only deploying one.



3

The analytics aren't a bonus feature. They're the business case for tenants, for leadership, and for the next budget conversation you need to win.



CREATE BETTER VENUE EXPERIENCES WITH MAPPEDIN

Mappedin is the leading indoor mapping platform transforming the way venues are experienced, managed, and understood.

Mappedin transforms building floor plans and spatial data into dynamic digital maps that power navigation, operations, analytics, and safety across complex environments. The Mappedin platform has mapped more than 10 billion square feet of indoor space, supporting world-class retail properties including Simon Property Group, Cadillac Fairview, and Klepierre.

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