

Research proposal

For
thecentre:mk



Assessing the relationship between the management and the retailers of thecentre:mk, evaluating the services provided to retailers and measuring their level of satisfaction with a view to suggesting improvement.

Prepared for: **thecentre:mk**
Central Milton Keynes, United Kingdom. MK9 3ES.

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1. Background

thecentre:mk is making its way to being one of the biggest and the best shopping attraction location in the UK. It was awarded the title: 7th Most Vibrant Shopping Mall in Great Britain (Source Experian 2002).

The building of thecentre:mk commenced in February 1975 and was officially opened to the public in August 1979. It's magnificent structure covers 1.3 million sq. ft net retail space on 35.0 acres of land, with three miles of shop fronts, which includes over 220 retail outlets and comprises a wide variety of tenant mix.

Being located in the heart of the town - Milton Keynes, it is easily reached by a large number of the UK population who are within a two-hour reach of the shopping centre. Milton Keynes itself is located mid-way between Birmingham and London, on the Oxford to Cambridge high technology arc. This strategic location accounts for the large number of visitors to thecentre:mk. thecentre:mk welcomes over 30 million visitors each year. The city is regarded as THE most successful of the 'New Towns' built since the war and is one of the fastest growing cities in the UK and one of the five richest districts in the UK.

The management of thecentre:mk is set out to ensure quality facilities and services to its customers, and because of this has been ranked as one of the best shopping centre in the UK. It has bagged numerous awards in various categories such as overall business of the year, employer of the year, Special mention for customer service, ranking in top 50 best UK workplaces, and loads of other Awards. These demonstrates the success of thecentre:mk's vision which is simply to provide the best shopping and leisure experience in the UK.

The centre is jointly owned by Prudential Assurance limited with 36% investment and Britels with 64% investment, while DTZ Debenham Tie Leung and Dalgleish & Co. deal with the Letting out of units within thecentre:mk. The day to day running of the Shopping centre is undertaken by Central Milton Keynes Shopping Management Company Ltd., whose main functions include managing the maintenance, security, marketing and finance issues of thecenter:mk.

2. Scope of Research

The scope of this project is to study the role played the management of thecentre:mk in terms of the services it providers to retailers who can be regarded as its intermediate customers, while the actual shoppers as the end consumers. Taking a point of view from the retailers at thecentre:mk, this research is set out to identifying the various service criteria used to assess the quality of services offered to the retailers by management of the shopping centre, and also to measure their levels of satisfaction with the service. This would lead to identifying ways in which the relationship between the Management and retailer can be better enhanced to foster improved ties amongst themselves and the shoppers. It seems likely that it will serve to improve the number of customer visits to the center, and their patronage with the retailers, which forms part of thecentre:mk's marketing strategy - *'to maintain existing customer loyalty as well as increase penetration, dwell time, frequency and spend.'*

From the materials and data available, extensive research has been carried out in the past on the customer aspect and perspective, looking at their perception of thecentre:mk as a whole and their levels of satisfaction of the services been rendered to them as shoppers.

But this research work aims to take a view from the retailers' angle - as an intermediate customer of the shopping centre management team. In order to keep your end-consumers (shoppers) totally happy and satisfied, you need to keep you intermediate customers equally happy with the services you provide to them. As much as thecentre:mk develops its own retail attractiveness and 'edge' that appeals to visitors, a lot still depends on the retailers to create the pull required for the customers to come and shop within the centre – and to come back for more.

This is why Management needs to take time to focus on the retailers as customers and endeavour to build high quality, long-term relationships as a major aspect of their business. The potential financial implication of losing a retailer could be very high for the centre; besides, if shoppers do not return as a result of poor service quality, that has a snow-balling effect as well. Poor relationship between the Centre management and retailers has long-term negative implications for all.

To further facilitate this research, the researcher will carry out a form of benchmarking (with the assistance and support of the Management of thecentre:mk) to assess the way management in other Regional Shopping Centres (RSC) in the UK relate with their retailers. This will be done with a view to identifying best practises, which can be used to improve the way in which business is done in thecentre:mk. The Regional shopping centres that will be involved in this aspect of the research work include:

1. Bluewater (South London)
2. Meadowhall (Sheffield)
3. Merryhill (Dudley)
4. Cribbs Causeway (Bristol)
5. Trafford Centre (Manchester)

thecenter:mk has in the past used these Regional Shopping Centre (RSC) as means for comparison to measure their performance in certain areas of the business. So the retailers at thecentremk will be surveyed to determine their perception of value received, quality, satisfaction with services, and satisfaction with the provider relative to other RSC.

3. Research Objectives

1. To first assess the relationship between the management and the retailers of the centre, and to do this we will need to:

- Identify the roles of the Management of thecentre:mk in terms of what service they provide to the retailers
- Identify the roles of the Retailers with respect to what they need to do to receive quality service from the centre.

2. To evaluate the services provided to retailers by the management of the centre by:
 - Identifying the criteria used by the management to assess their own service performance
 - Identifying the criteria used by the retailers in assessing the service performance of the centre management
3. To measure the levels of satisfaction of retailers - of the services being provided by the management of thecentre:mk – by comparing the retailers’ expectations and perceptions of service
4. To identify ways by which thecentre:mk management can enhance a better relationship between themselves and their retailers as compared with other RSCs. And finally
5. To make recommendations to thecentre:mk management on how they could further improve their relationship with retailers.

4. Methodology

The research methodology to be used by the researcher will consist of both primary and secondary research.

- ***Secondary Research.***

This will involve studying the relevant materials available, review of existing literature on related subjects, including data on past and present research work carried out on the facility. Information will also be collected from the Internet and the centre’s website.

- ***Primary Research.***

This will be collected through

1. Interviews,
 - Conducted on a one-on-one bases with relevant management personnel of thecentre:mk to determine the role of the management (and the expected role of the retailers), as well as to identity the services it provides to the retailers.
 - Conducted with a few selected retailers – their store managers, assistants and sales persons - on a one-on-one basis to better understand their interface with thecentre:mk, and how they assess the services the Management of thecentre:mk provides them. In the process we will identify the various criteria by which they assess the service.

All interviews will be tape recorded for the sole purpose data collection. Recording form the interviews will then be transcribed by the researcher to gather the information required. Anonymity will be guaranteed to the participants.

2. Based on the information and findings gathered from the interviews conducted, a questionnaire will be drafted and shown to the centre management for their comments.
3. A pilot test of the draft questionnaire will be carried out on some retailers. The corrected questionnaire will then be cleared with the centre management.
4. The final questionnaire will be administered to a large number of retailers in thecentre:mk.
5. The data collected via the questionnaires will be analysed and presented using graphs and tables. There will also be a formal presentation of findings.

5. Schedule

The project begins in July and is to be completed by late October with the final written form of the dissertation submitted to the University of Buckingham by mid-November. An exact time schedule with detailed plan of activities will be provided at the start of the project when all issues have been clarified for final kick-off of the project.

6. Costs

All direct expenses incurred by the researcher and her supervisor in carrying out the project will be paid by thecentre:mk.

These expenses include:

- Travelling and accommodation (where applicable) expenses related to
 - Buckingham to Milton Keynes and return
 - Buckingham to other Regional Shopping Centres and return.
- Cost of communication (i.e. telephone calls, postage)
- Stationery, printing and binding cost.

Attached to this proposal is an **estimate** of costs that would be incurred. On conclusion and submission of the final report an invoice stating the **exact** costs and expenditure (receipts will be attached as far as is possible) will be raised to offset all expenses incurred.

7. Confidentiality

The information obtained in the course of the research will be dealt with in strict confidence and will be used mainly for academic purposes, unless otherwise approved by the sponsor. Academic staff at the University of Buckingham will have access to the thesis for academic assessment purposes only.

Before the commencement of the research, a formal signature indicating approval and total support will be required by the Management of thecentre:mk.

Budget ESTIMATED cost of Research Expenses			
	Detail Break down of Cost	£	£
1	Estimated Bus travel cost from Buckingham to Milton Keynes @ £2.70/day return for 30days (6 weeks).		81
2	Estimated train travel cost from Milton Keynes to other RSC (approximate, but could vary depending on time of travel)		
	Milton Keynes to Sheffield return	45	
	Milton Keynes to Dudley return	30	
	Milton Keynes to Bristol return	45	
	Milton Keynes to Manchester return	30	
	Milton Keynes to South London return	25	
	Local taxi charges within the RSC towns	50	
	Total		225
3	Communication:		
	Postage (stamps, envelopes, other charges)	20	
	Telephone calls (telephone cards, etc)	20	
	Total		40
4	Out of town Living Expenses for total 5 nights (1 night at each location). Accommodation @ £30 per location		150
5	Printing and copying of questionnaires, letters, reports and general paper work		150
6	Stationaries - papers, clips, staples, etc		20
7	Binding of 3 copies of Report @ £25 each		75
	Grand Total		£741

Please note that these costs are simply estimates made by the researcher.