

Retailers Master Pandemic-Fired Survival Lessons

The past 11 months have seen the commercial real estate landscape increasingly littered with retailers on life support. But it has also taught other retailers nationwide critical survival skills honed by the need to pivot through unprecedented change.

With the one-year anniversary of Covid's initial onslaught soon upon us, an array of retail entities that have weathered the storm are now able to reflect on how they adapted to persevere and sell another day. How did they pull it off? Read on.

Pebb Capital

The developer and owner of Riviera Beach, Fla. oceanfront retail property [Ocean Walk](#) helped take a load off tenants' shoulders, while also encouraging a safer environment for all who worked at or patronized the center. Boca Raton-based real estate and private equity investment firm [Pebb Capital](#) served up short-term rent deferrals. The company also cobbled together extra outdoor space by teaming with city officials to close off the center's adjacent side street. The firm also arranged with tenants to make sure they all had appropriate sanitizing materials and methods before reopening stores.

"We were fortunate to have an existing outdoor layout at Ocean Walk when the pandemic restrictions were enacted," says Todd Rosenberg, Pebb Capital co-founder and managing principal. "This allowed successful implementation of social distancing while still providing guests a lifestyle retail experience. It also boosted foot traffic for our tenants, a vital component to keeping their businesses afloat."

Integra Investments

[Aventura Park Square](#), among the most progressive mixed-use projects in its area, opened prior to Covid and distinguished itself by staking out a market niche promoting wellness. The Aventura, Fla.-based center blazed trails in providing a health-first retail environment. As if envisioning a future need for social distancing, [Integra Investments](#) principal Victor Ballestas made sure the square had extra-wide sidewalks and open staircases, which now are de rigueur elements of design. In addition, Ballestas ratcheted up the focus on wellness by turning space intended for other public uses into an expanded outdoor dining area.

Ram Realty Advisors

Supermarkets and grocery stores have rolled with the pandemic's punches, proving to be indispensable sources of the staples Americans have required to see themselves through the crisis. The constancy delivered by food retailers is a big reason real estate movers and shakers view these stores as key cogs in mixed-use developments.

That truth hasn't escaped [Ram Realty Advisors](#), specialists in acquiring and developing multifamily, retail and mixed-use properties in Southeastern high-growth markets.

Not long ago, the company unveiled [CURV](#), a 243-unit mixed-use multifamily development in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., boasting as anchor a sprawling 47,000-square-foot, ground-floor Whole Foods. CURV's on-site refrigeration lockers promise to be welcome add-ons for those who desire grocery delivery from Whole Foods and other supermarkets.

Joint venture

The force behind the redevelopment of Coconut Grove, Fla. alfresco lifestyle center [CocoWalk](#) places neighborhood first, last and always in its business strategy.

Comprised of Federal Realty Investment Trust, The Comras Company and Grass River Property, the CocoWalk ownership group has not only made the plaza a welcoming home away from home for the community it serves, but has prioritized inclusion of intriguing retailers with a highly selective presence. The varied retailer mix, superlative cuisine and singular experiences, has helped cement the center's distinction as a place matching the needs of local citizens, working professionals, and Coconut Grove visitors.

"Our strategy has always been neighborhood focused," says Stuart Biel, senior vice president of regional leasing for Federated Realty Investment Trust. "By curating a mix of local, regional and select national retailers, our goal was to redevelop CocoWalk in a way that would mirror the lifestyle of the Grove community."

Origin

For a quarter century, [Origin](#) has created and transitioned commercial developments for the Sunshine State's most celebrated brands. Collectively, its projects total more than 10 million square feet, and have served the needs of such instantly-recognizable names as Facebook, Hugo Boss, Pipeline Workspaces, Prada, Viacom and others. As general contractor, it creates retail and restaurant buildouts, along with corporate office interiors and ground-up commercial structures. Company co-founders John Wood and A.J. Mueller have noted a number of Covid influences on retail. For instance, retailers are placing more emphasis on front-of-house store planning, design and construction.

And restaurants have begun altering floor plans to give them both more outdoor dining space and additional square footage allocated to to-go and delivery orders.