

Midway at the Mall

Attraction brands coming to a mall near you

By Katherine Field

With all the fanfare of a favorite midway attraction, select entertainment concepts are finding their way into shopping center spaces.

And thrill-seeking developers may find these attractions a perfect fit to fill dark department store spaces or light up open-air projects.

Europe's biggest attractions operator, Merlin Entertainments Group, is delivering several of its mainstay brands—Legoland



length of stay, it distinguishes one project from another, it creates a sense of village or community—especially if it's a family-oriented activity—and it enhances opportunities, particularly in lifestyle centers or bigger projects.”

Woodfield gets a leg up: One center that will be home to a Merlin attraction is the Streets of Woodfield, a 630,000-sq.-ft., open-air lifestyle center in Schaumburg, Ill., owned by Chicago-based Joseph Freed and



Discovery Centre, Madame Tussauds and Sea Life Centre among them—to the United States and, with Los Angeles-based Samuels & Co. as its exclusive broker, is eyeing shopping center sites across the country in which to place its brands as anchor tenants.

“Being entertained, and specifically having intellectual property as part of the entertainment, is playing an increasingly

The Streets of Woodfield, a lifestyle center in Schaumburg, Ill., is transforming a vacant, two-story building into Legoland Discovery Centre, opening in August.

important role in differentiating one shopping center from another,” said Howard Samuels, president of Samuels & Co. “From a macro perspective, entertainment in the right environment complements shopping, because it increases

Associates. Anchored by Carson Pirie Scott, Dick’s Sporting Goods and AMC Theatres, and featuring a high-ambiance atmosphere with historic streetlights, decorative street furniture, fountains, ponds and arbors, the Streets of Woodfield will be adding a Legoland Discovery Centre this August. The 30,000-sq.-ft. attraction will feature theme-park-like attractions such as a

dragon ride, adventure trail and 4-D cinema incorporating fantastical Lego creations and special effects. It will also offer hands-on Lego play using the iconic interlocking colored bricks.

Legoland Discovery Centre will be housed in a vacated two-story building at the south end of the center. The entertainment use is designed not only to bring added traffic to the Streets of Woodfield and the entire area, but to serve as a successful U.S. debut for one of Merlin's premier attraction concepts.

Merlin's U.S. foothold: According to broker Howard Samuels, Merlin Entertainments is gaining domestic ground. The first Sea Life Centre in the United States will open in Carlsbad, Calif., in July 2008, positioned at the front entry to the Legoland Theme Park. Madame Tussauds opened in Washington, D.C., in October 2007, and will be opening in Hollywood in March 2009. "We're finalizing our discussions with Meadowlands Xanadu for the opening of an Observation Wheel in November 2008," said Samuels. "The Legoland Discovery Centre in Meadowlands Xanadu is predicted to open in March 2009, and we are in discussions with Mall of America for Legoland Discovery Centre and perhaps a few other attractions."

What entertainment brings to the table: Cinemas have already demonstrated the positive impact they have on shopping center attendance; so have restaurants. Attractions appear destined to wield that much power, and more. "In the case of Legoland, developers across the country are realizing the value that an authentic brand of entertainment can bring," said Samuels. "A few are considering a re-design of a portion of their projects to utilize—and integrate in an intelligent way—the Lego brand," he said. Intelligent integration, said Samuels, means incorporating more than a Legoland Discovery Centre at one end of a mall, but also introducing the characters to common areas and offering Lego-inspired entertainment—such as miniature golf—to other parts of the center. Intelligent integration also includes complementary tenancing.

"OshKosh and Carter's, for example,

Merlin's Movers and Shakers

Merlin Entertainments Group is a huge player in the attractions arena, second only to Disney in its worldwide offerings. And now the German company has set its sights on the United States for its next expansion wave. Iconic brands include:



Legoland Discovery Centre

- Lego-themed features all under one roof
 - Dramatic rides, play area, 4-D cinema experience
- www.legolanddiscoverycentre.com



Madame Tussauds

- World-famous London attraction featuring wax portraits
- www.madame-tussauds.co.uk



Sea Life Centre

- Interactive guide to the oceans of the world
 - Comprehensive and entertaining aquarium experience
- www.sealife.co.uk



The Dungeons

- A self-described horror fest, The Dungeons experience combines live actors, rides, shows and special effects to transport visitors back to darker times.
- www.thedungeons.com



London Eye

- The world's tallest observation wheel
 - Features a 30-minute flight in fully enclosed glass capsules
- www.londoneye.com

U.S. expansion for Merlin is strategic, with clear plans to locate five of its concepts—Legoland Discovery Centre, Sea Life, Madame Tussauds, The Dungeons and London Eye "The Wheel"—in top-tier retail centers, as well as integrating the indoor brands with larger outdoor theme parks. "We plan to open five new attractions worldwide each year," said Johannes Mock, director of site selection worldwide for Merlin Entertainments Group. "This is an aggressive growth plan."

Merlin is looking to open one Legoland Discovery Centre per major metropolitan statistical area (MSA) and is targeting locations in lifestyle centers with strong co-tenants, good parking and high visibility.

are increasingly looking for sites in lifestyle and community and power centers," explained Samuels. "An OshKosh and a Carter's store, at about 10,000 sq. ft., would be perfect next to a Legoland Discovery Centre. Great brands, great products, great affinity," he said.

Developers will face challenges in incorporating a Legoland or a Sea Life Centre into the mix. Space considerations are always an issue, as is communicating with a German company. "The communication between Merlin and developers is essential," said Samuels. Both, he said, have to understand what each has to offer.

"Merlin will be seeking locations that appear to be logical fits," said Samuels, "and developers will need to understand Merlin's parking, visibility and access needs—as well as how to integrate a Merlin attraction.

"A 35,000- or 40,000-sq.-ft. anchor in the right spot in the right space will clearly enhance certain experiences in a major way," said Samuels.

Merlin Entertainments' rollout plans include three-to-five attractions per year worldwide, with two to three of those slated for the United States.

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