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## Build the biggest and strongest personal network you can today, it will definitely pay off in the future

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By Robert  
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This year marks my twentieth year in this industry. I've seen good times, great times, bad times and crazy times. I've seen the business through the eyes of a retailer, broker, property manager, and owner-developer. There are, and have always been, two common threads... It's best to think as far "outside the box" as possible, and never lose sight of the fact that this will always be a relationship business. The people you know are probably more important than what you know, and chances are, if you're in this business for the long haul, the person in the small cubicle next to you today will be more influential in your life than the guy currently occupying the corner office. Build the biggest and strongest personal network you can today; it will definitely pay off in the future.

Those of us in the shopping center industry are coming up to the end of yet another successful year, and even though books don't get closed out until January, the ICSC Show in New York has always, for me at least, heralded the end of the dealmaking year. It happens

early in December just before people gear up for holiday parties and vacation plans.

All in all, from what I see, it's been a really good year and as long as businesses remain profitable, consumers remain confident, and the federal government is keeping interest rates low, retailers will continue to expand.

But better yet, I see a trend of retailers looking for ways to improve, cultivate and modify their concepts, to assure their futures. You know, thinking outside the box.

I recently noted in one of the trades that Best Buy has plans to test a new concept, targeting women between 45 and 65 years old, who are still caring for their own children as well as elderly relatives. These newly-developed 13,000 - 15,000 s/f units will sell nutritional supplements, exercise equipment and personal electronics related to health care and possibly even contain a pharmacy. The Gap may also hit the same market with a new concept allowing the retailer to age with its consumer.

Another burgeoning concept and prime example of adaptation is a host of new companies planning to develop drop-off stores where people arrange to sell their merchandise on the Internet. These drop-off stores take the work out of running an auction. Although it is easy to buy on eBay, selling is a lot more complicated and involved.

I Sold, Quick-Drop and Auction House are just three of the approximately 20 new concepts, which have been launched over the last two years, all vying for a market that eBay estimates can generate upwards of \$10 billion in sales by the end of 2005, and all target the Over-30 customer who has had time to acquire a lot of excess stuff and now wants to get rid of it.

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There is no doubt we are getting more dependent on Internet technology.

We have all read in the trades that the Internet would be the fall of the traditional retailer; it's not happening. Fifteen percent of U.S. households today maintain "home" networks and of these, 50% are wireless with projections of increases to 40% of households by 2008. Retailers are gearing up and priming the market to sell "the home of the future" where appliances talk to one another and your

whole environment could be controlled remotely. Consumer electronic chains such as Best Buy, Tweeters and Comp-USA are all committed to jump into this emerging market. In fact, Best Buy, as usual, is leading the market with their "geek squad" installation service giving this retailer the ultimate pay-off... getting into the consumer's home. Then, once inside, they have a stake in the person's life and hopefully, theirs will be the place the consumer returns to.

On the flip side of the coin, however, I recently needed to purchase a new accessory for my cell phone so I went to the AT&T store in one of our centers. Regrettably, the retailer sells the accessory, but it was only available on their website. The next two things I did? I purchased the item from the retailer's competitor and checked to see if I have a percentage rent provision with AT&T.

I look forward to seeing you in New York at the ICSC Show. We, once again, will be at the best location, at the base of the escalator where, sooner or later, everyone attending has to pass.

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