

## STORE OPERATIONS Parking Lots

Surging digital demand has made retailers' parking lots, such as this Hy-Vee location, a hub of commerce.



## Just Outside the Box

THE HUMBLE PARKING LOT HAS BECOME A DIFFERENT KIND OF RETAIL DESTINATION AND HUB OF COMMERCE.

By Debby Garbato

**T**he purpose and value that parking lots provide retailers had been evolving gradually, but then, as with other aspects of retailing affected by the pandemic, things changed suddenly.

Today, parking lots are interactive areas with amenities that generate profits, lure consumers into stores and/or increase the duration of visits. Parking lot perks can include everything from dedicated pickup areas for online orders to electric car-charging stations, WiFi, outdoor seating and dog walk areas. Retailers also use lots

for community events and seasonal merchandising events.

"It's about thinking outside the four walls about how to generate additional sales inside, and retailers are pushing the envelope," says Gary Fields, VP operations, West Coast at Jacksonville, Fla.-based Regency Centers, an owner of 406 shopping centers, 80% of which are anchored by grocers.

The biggest impact on parking lot activities occurred as a result of the pandemic. There was exponential growth of grocery pickup services as shoppers avoided entering physical stores. In early 2020, only 6.6% of major retailers offered grocery pickup, but by early 2021, that figure had risen to 50.7%, according



### Key Takeaways

- ▶ Parking lots are interactive areas with amenities that generate profits, lure consumers into stores and/or increase the duration of visits.
- ▶ The biggest impact on parking lot activities occurred as a result of the pandemic, due to the exponential growth of grocery pickup services.
- ▶ With consumers spending more time in parking lots, retailers are paying more attention to how lots look from a maintenance, cleanliness and aesthetic perspective.

to Chicago-based Digital Commerce 360. Among shoppers, 75% have used curbside pickup over the past six months.

Hy-Vee's online transactions quadrupled during the pandemic's first few weeks, making parking lots a destination, according to Dawn E. Buzynski, director, strategic communications at the West Des Moines, Iowa-based grocer. "Parking areas became a vital part of business as many customers ordered groceries online."

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