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Integrated Design the Key to Achieving Profitable Hospitality

At first glance, maximizing innovative retail, operating and concept design solutions may seem like three different disciplines. But following an integrated and holistic approach to design represents the best way to help brands optimize both profitability and customer hospitality to help support growth.

The approach begins with considering the three critical components of design:

- The Customer Journey
- The Team Member Journey
- Brand Guidance

Integrating each of these components in a synergistic manner represents a key factor in truly optimizing both the design and the investment. That's because true brand or concept optimization exists at the intersection of these three factors.

Concepts that focus only on the customer journey and create a unique restaurant without considering as equally important the functional or operational aspects open their doors to potential trouble. Initially, a new concept or a newly revamped concept will draw the customers' attention. But the ability to hold the customers' attention and ultimately generate those all-important repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth will suffer if the functional aspects of the design don't measure up to the expectations the brand's promise establishes. This includes food quality, speed of service and the employees' overall ability to deliver the right hospitality levels.

One critical area restaurant development professionals need to consider is the level and location of all the resources included in the design. Not considering and optimizing each operational component during the design phase could result in wasted resources and facility areas, and increased capital costs, all of which work together to erode the concept's profitability and return-on-investment.

Understanding the team members' journey, meaning the employees' work experience, in both the back of the house and front of the house, is an important aspect of integrated design. That's because the team members' journey involves many operating parameters, including the processes and procedures, the platforms available (equipment and technology), as well as the products and promotions that surround a concept. It is important for restaurants to take all of this into consideration when designing a new prototype to avoid costly fixes down the road.

For existing operations, it is also important to review these parameters occasionally to measure their effectiveness and how employees leverage each one when delivering customer service. If you don't know which of these parameters gets in the way of team members' ability to deliver a good customer experience, you can't fix it.

The initial discovery process includes an objective analysis of the hospitality employees provide to guests; how they use the equipment and other resources, along with the ergonomics of this interface; and the issues that inhibit a higher level of efficiency. Knowing this



Consultant's Take



One goal of Au Bon Pain's new urban prototype was to be able to execute the chain's diverse menu in as small of a space as possible, while being able to process more than 400 transactions per hour.

information provides a critical baseline that will facilitate designing the right facility resource in the right place at the right time to optimize both the customer journey and the employee journey.

Part of this process also involves having the right labor in the right place at the right time. Sometimes restaurant companies try to resolve brand execution problems by throwing labor at the issue, without truly understanding how much is necessary to resolve the challenge or providing guidelines on how to most effectively use the labor provided. This is similar to buying a Lamborghini without knowing how to take it out of first gear.

It is just not going to go very fast or provide the experience that you bought it for.

Customers may not be able to specifically tell you if they had an efficient or productive experience, but most will feel it if they did not, thus impacting the likelihood of repeat business.

Similarly, focusing only on the team member journey and the functional aspects of design without the right retail design in the front of the house might provide customers with a good functional experience but not necessarily with a good environmental experience. This scenario could also impact the frequency of customer visits.

The ability to deliver a good customer experience must take into account a number of retail design elements, such as lighting, space allocation, table design and arrangement, and sight lines. Additionally, the optimum design must consider all service options the concept offers, including in-store dining, takeout, delivery, curbside, catering and drive-thru. Depending on

the concept, integrate any or all of these elements into the design in a synergistic way to drive the right customer and employee experiences at all touch points. This will allow the concept to end up with the best design.

Industrial engineering techniques such as time and motion studies, capacity and bottleneck analysis, work station and equipment design and real life or computer simulation of the new design paired with the right application of physical and cognitive ergonomics principals, help support functional design optimization. Similarly, retail-oriented techniques will help support design optimization.

These techniques range from initial discovery of the current design, to emulator studies of other concepts and storyboarding, to three-dimensional sketches and videos of the new design.

The critical third aspect of the design process, brand guidance, is best done by the brand's employees, who lead the design team. As key stakeholders, this group's role is to ensure the new design reflects the essence of the brand promise and highlights what differentiates the concept from the competition. Sometimes this role includes deciding if certain aspects of design will be more focused on the customer journey or the team member journey and helping to create the right balance between these two areas to optimize the essence of the brand in the new design.

While assisting Domino's Pizza to create its "Pizza Theater" concept, we used an integrated process to help design a new customer experience while maintaining or enhancing the efficiency of the employee experience. An integrated approach was also used to help create a new urban design for Au Bon Pain in New York City.

Key challenges here included facilitating production and service of as many of the numerous Au Bon Pain menu offerings in as small of a real estate location as possible. A key objective was to develop a design that would be able to process more than 400 customers during their peak hour.

Some concepts may be hesitant to follow an integrated approach due to the perceived cost concerns. But this is the best way to ensure an optimum design; the higher the integration between the functional aspect of design and the form aspect of design, guided by the brand requirements and promise, the greater the impact and return on investment of the new design for the concept.

Following this integrated approach is the best way to deliver the highest level of profitable hospitality that will fuel brand growth, the ultimate goal of a thriving brand. +