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## Now is the right time to hire a foodservice consultant

by Juan Martinez • 20 Apr 2009

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Rebranding and store redesign are easy expenses to justify in prosperous times. But when funds get short, quick-service brands may be tempted to shrink rather than grow. However, proactive ones know this is the time to forge forward, whether through rebranding or store redesign.

While others sleep, the proactive brands are at work, including engaging industrial and operations engineering or other foodservice consulting firms to undertake such redesign efforts. Foodservice consultants offer brands multiple advantages as they reinvigorate the concept, including improving the execution and delivery of the customer experience.

### **Breadth + depth of knowledge**

Consultants, through their experience, bring a significant breadth of experience and industry knowledge to an organization that adds to the company's existing depth of experience and knowledge. Such outside consultants are not replacements to a brand's internal expertise but rather are extensions of the groups within.

By means of their expertise in the foodservice industry, consultants provide knowledge that crosses all segments, from catering and casual dining to QSR and fast casual. This position allows consultants to pull from a vast well of resources across different concepts as they consider solutions to improve operational execution and customer experience.

### **Outside objectivity**

Operations and industrial engineering consultants like ours provide a different view of a

company's operational execution paradigms and current performance. Such consultants uncover issues and objectively quantify and detail specific improvement opportunities in the current operational execution and use of resources. This information creates the baseline for the necessary strategic efforts and changes to increase return-on-investment to fuel brand growth.

For example, the importance of speed of service is most acute for QSR concepts, where every second counts. Consider that a 10-second window-time improvement can result in a peak hourly throughput increase in the drive-thru of somewhere between 15 percent and 25 percent. Sometimes, finding those 10 seconds can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Operations and industrial engineering consultants are well equipped with the tools, methodologies and experience to help QSR brands pinpoint those weak points and offer solutions to those challenges.

### **Competitive benchmarking**

Once that baseline is determined, consultants also can provide brands with competitive benchmarking information in many operational areas including:

- Labor cost and labor efficiency management
- Customer service levels
- Peak hourly throughput
- Operating costs
- Resource utilization
- Facility size and overall design

This competitive benchmark information provides a clear view of the brand's current operational performance in the marketplace, including objective metrics on the concept's operational and facility strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

### **Best practices**

Consultants are a great source of best practices in many areas, whether equipment and technology applications, operating processes and procedures or labor management practices. They can also provide insight into design processes, including "employee-centric" ergonomic work stations, resource optimization, existing facility re-engineering or new prototype design and "right sizing."

### **Change catalysts**

Proactive brands understand that today's strength can be tomorrow's weakness and improvement and evolution should be a continuous journey, not a destination. Consultants, then, are catalysts for change, supporting executive decision making that can result in brand improvement and increases in customer satisfaction.

Consultants can help with this positioning by creating designs that combine groups of ideas to maximize the impact. Their experience and methods allow them to provide brands a unique objective quantification and representation of the business. Paired with competitive benchmarking and best practices, their insight helps create the perfect platform to support evolution, growth and improvement of the brand.

### **Implementation support**

The best ideas can fail with poor implementation and execution. Consultants also provide brands with support throughout the implementation phase to support the translation and application of the new ideas and designs. This support includes overseeing the cultural and organizational impact that often accompanies change.

The benefits outside consultants offer foodservice organizations are significant, especially during the current recession. As companies optimize their resources and apply greater fiscal responsibility, outside consultants can be part of this fiscal plan. These outside experts provide a great ROI for foodservice organizations, including QSR concepts, by helping brands design operating platforms and concepts that deliver profitable hospitality, through holistic integrated designs.