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NOT A QUICK FIX



MANY CAFÉ OWNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFURBISHMENT IS THAT IT WILL PROVIDE A "QUICK FIX" FOR THE BUSINESS.

Take King Street, Newtown, as an example; there is a constant stream of new owners taking on existing failed café sites in the quest to enter the café market. Often they have no background in food service and basically re-paint the shop, put a new sign on the front door, select a well known specialty coffee brand and re-print the menus, thinking it's going to turn into a thriving café.

When they make this small investment and re-open their doors, they simply get a renovated shop. Why not use this situation to also have a critical look at the business and brand, instead of repeating the same mistakes, by asking the question: "Why should customers buy from me as opposed to someone else?"

As simple as it sounds, it is surprising how many business owners cannot give a simple and succinct answer to this. If you don't know, how can you expect your customers to know? Good coffee and service isn't enough (these are now a given), so what's your real point of difference, and how are you going to communicate this to your customers?

Is it that:

- "you offer the best priced coffee in the area"
- "you have unique products"
- "all your products are organically sourced"
- "your service is the best in the industry".

You can probably pick one you are most comfortable with easily. What is much more difficult, however, is to take your strategy and actually be able to deliver on this promise, every day of the year.

The difficulty is that a "point of difference" itself is not tangible; whereas, a correctly executed retail design will allow you to communicate a consistent message through physical elements that customers can see, touch and experience.

Some physical elements that can carry your differentiation message to customers include: store ambience/interior design, merchandise presentation style and location, store branding, signage, packaging, menu boards, printed menus, uniforms, stationery, sounds and smells.

When considering how these elements come together, a strong logo and brand platform is the first step. Speak to a professional company to develop ideas for you and in the process various questions will arise, such as: "What message do I want to send my customers? Are we friendly or boutique/premium? What colours represent our brand?" This will begin the process of bringing your message to life. The store interior and atmosphere is the most essential component, with customers now becoming more critical of interiors – especially in the food industry – so each element needs careful consideration to bring your brand to life.

These physical elements are important while customers are in the space, but how are you going to get people back and spread the word about the wonderful experience they have had?

This is where the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, a good website and PR can help. They provide a platform to remind your customers about your unique offer and give them a reason to return. You still need to think about a message that is the foundation of all your communication and ensure it links back to your "differentiation strategy". Kitchen By Mike in Roseberry does this well, with their daily menu based on seasonal produce being posted on Facebook each day.

One business Design Portfolio has worked with recently, The Sugar Cube in Wollongong are famous for their homemade Liège Belgium waffles, cooked fresh to order. They took the opportunity

to step back and look at their already successful business and brand image, while upgrading to a new larger site only 200 metres away. Their product was unique and always over-delivered, but their demountable was not aligning with the quality of product offered.

The new interior and atmosphere Design Portfolio created for the new site is fun and reminiscent of an old-school milk bar. This reference is apparent in the new logo, retro uniforms, pinstripe awning, simple red and white colour scheme and large custom-designed mural along the main wall. You also get the wonderful smell of freshly made waffles lingering in the space, adding theatre and anticipation to the experience. Throw in Roger's DJ mix announced via Facebook each week, and you get an unstoppable combination that has them busy every night of the week and exploring franchise options for other locations.

So before launching into that "refresh" of your current premises or a new site, stop for a moment and decide "what is going to make us stand out" and what physical elements can we utilise in order to communicate this to our customers? If these are done in a consistent and coordinated way, people will be buying from you instead of your competition.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Danielle Visione is a director of Design Portfolio. Design Portfolio is an award winning company with over 25 years' experience in Retail and Hospitality Design. They are a multi-disciplinary team that integrate retail design, interior design, industrial design and graphic design to create retail environments that improve your business.

For more information and projects, visit their website: www.designportfolio.com.au or call (02) 9439 1106.