



Memorable moments

Design is a powerful tool for providing a great customer experience, says Philip Howard, managing director of Catering Design Group

We're often asked by operators within garden centres and farm shops, "What's the key to creating a great customer experience within my restaurant or café space?" Our answer is always the same, it is all about looking at the individual touch points throughout the customer journey to ensure you're creating a memorable experience every time.

This isn't just about visual appeal of the space, but also how it feels. A happy and loyal customer will feel engaged with their surroundings, whilst getting a real sense of your personality and story. If the space works, customers will unconsciously know which route to take within the restaurant or café, together with where the retail opportunities are located. The quality of your food and service are at the heart of the great customer experience and the design process will take all of these elements into account.

DEFINITION

Defining your space will guide the customer journey and experience. With the clever use of furniture, materials, fabrics and maximising opportunities provided by outside spaces, it is possible to lead customers through the space by creating interest, pathways and focal points. Zones work in the same way, subconsciously leading the customer through the space to ensure maximum engagement with their environment.

PERFECT SYNERGY

Successful catering operations within garden centres and farm shops display perfect synergy between their front- and back-of-house facilities. This means that both are able to operate effectively and with maximum efficiency at all times to deliver your menu and manage customer and staff flows.



The kitchen is the engine room of every catering facility – irrespective of menu and service style. If your kitchen is unable to service your front-of-house requirements, the quality of your service and food will suffer and, in turn, so will the customer experience. Service style and menu will also impact your kitchen size, design and specification of equipment. The most effective designs will consider the whole operation and, if done correctly, will deliver great service and improved profitability.

QUEUE MANAGEMENT

Queuing is inevitable in any busy and successful operation. However, if this process is not managed well it will ruin the experience for your customers. Positioning display and retail points along the route will keep customers interested and present them with opportunities for impulse buying and cross-selling. Traffic around the main counter areas and till points can be managed by introducing pick-up points for coffee and call-to-order items, or the remote location of condiment stations.

Customer confusion and crossover with staff can be avoided by creating defined routes from entry to payment and seating areas, while also considering the decision-making process for your customers, by displaying menus ahead of the servery to avoid hold-ups.

Additionally, think about display styles – multi-tiers work well for quick and easy selection of grab 'n' go items as do chefs' tables, which keep customers moving as they choose.

HAVE YOU GOT THE RIGHT AMBIENCE?

Ambience is an area often overlooked when designing a café or restaurant space and yet is critical to achieving a great experience for your

customers, particularly in large, airy spaces with high ceilings. Operators with high, open spaces should consider dividing the space with ceiling rafts or screens. A catering space with lots of hard surfaces (particularly glass) will amplify noise, so introduce soft surfaces such as upholstery, flooring and planting.

There's nothing worse for customers than the clatter of crockery, pots and pans drowning out their conversations. To counteract this, think carefully about the positioning of clearing stations and open passes so it doesn't interrupt the pleasant 'buzz' of happy customers.

Acoustics have come a long way and there are now numerous choices available to operators. Consider specialist acoustic materials, which come in all shapes and sizes from lighting drums to wall graphics and panelling.

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Customers want to understand your story and learn about your heritage, culture and values. Design is an extremely powerful tool in the art of storytelling. Telling your story can be really easy to achieve and doesn't need to be expensive. Use framed pictures, statement wall graphics or maps and memorabilia to showcase your produce and local history. Customers still love to see one-off vintage pieces especially if they have a story behind them. They can be a real talking point and give a unique touch.

Great design has the potential to transform your restaurant or café space to create a great experience for customers, whilst also increasing your revenue, profit, footfall and spend per head, together with driving loyalty.

For further information, call 01327 314 860 or visit www.cateringdesign.co.uk