

SPACE: FORCE

Integrating Architecture And The Brand Experience

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Todd Carson

A statement I occasionally hear when discussing a new branch bank design with a client is “I want the space to look like an Apple store!” Most of these clients don’t actually want a branch that looks like an Apple store. What they are asking for is a brand experience. Apple’s slick and highly curated spaces capture the innovative spirit of Apple’s products. They are able to subtly communicate the quality of their

product and their level of service through a retail environment that epitomizes the brand experience.

DEFINING BRAND EXPERIENCE

Technology allows companies to constantly bombard us with information and messages. As a result of this information overload, we are inclined to block out all of the noise and visual clutter. Brand experience allows you to cut through the constant clamor for your attention by providing your customer with a lasting real-world experience that can build relationships and trust in your brand. The ex-

BankNewport in Rhode Island recently redesigned its branches to better fit its brand.



perience reinforces that your organization lives up to the promise of your message through technology, architectural experience and positive human interaction.

All projects require a complex and often confusing process to design the architecture of the space, select finishes, furniture, environmental graphics, and incorporate technology and marketing. Proactively considering the brand experience allows the design team to elevate the process, establish goals and set out to create a brand experience from inception. It can be remarkably obvious when branding and marketing elements are incorporated into the architecture as an afterthought or require deviation from a highly devel-

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oped design to accommodate late decisions. Early collaboration between the owner, architect, interior designer and branding consultant is key to a successful outcome.

Think of brand experience in terms of the physical space that you are about to create. A space can tell your customers a lot about your organization and your values. Spatial volume, light, colors, materials and textures define the feel of your space and can create a warm and homey feel or a cool, sleek urban feel. Should your customers feel like you are welcoming them into your living room or that you are ready to get their business done? These decisions should be based on the culture of your organization and reflect the values of the people you serve. Most importantly, these issues should be identified and considered early in the design process.

ESTABLISHING BRAND IDENTITY

Larger banking institutions tend to benefit from an established corporate identity and strategies for branding and marketing. They are well positioned to move into new markets with established brand recognition. Smaller community banking institutions have the benefit of home-grown recognition with local bankers serving local customers. When community banking institutions expand into new markets they usually encounter an identity crisis; they become a community institution with a regional presence. Establishing a brand identity can help a small emerging institution communicate their values to a wider audience and attract new customers.

Smaller institutions tend to handle their marketing on a micro level, creating messaging and marketing collateral on a smaller scale with fewer consistent guiding principles. This can be advantageous and cost effective when dealing with shifting technologies and banking trends, but it can be a disadvantage when all of the stakeholders are brought to the table to envision a new branch without a common vision.

This is where a strategic partnership between architects, interior designers and branding consultants benefit your organization the most. An integrated design team can guide the bank's decision makers through a collaborative process



that embraces all aspects of design, considering space, material, technology, messaging, culture and human interaction. This collaboration allows the consultants on the design team to create a unified brand experience rather than one where each consultant works independently, resulting in a disjointed product. Creating a brand experience takes far more effort than placing posters on a wall or signage on a soffit.

Select a branding partner that is the right fit for your institution or consult your architect and interior designer. They may already have an established strategic partnership with a branding firm. Evaluate the status of your brand identity and determine the level of service that you require. Some branding firms specialize in marketing materials,

graphics and print media. Others specialize in process oriented development of a complete brand identity...your name, colors, messaging, and strategic goals. Some specialized firms provide turnkey services with in-house design and marketing but don't necessarily provide comprehensive development of brand experience.

INCORPORATING BRAND IDENTITY

Once you have established a brand identity, be prepared to provide the design team with PMS colors, fonts, high resolution logos and other digital graphics. The designers should know what defines your approach to customer service and the people who serve them. How do staff members connect with customers? How do they embrace the brand image? Through words, actions, engagement?

A thoughtful design will consider how each potential customer enters the space, their first experience, how and when they are approached by a staff member and where each interaction will take place. Technology, marketing imagery and messaging should be integrated into the flow of the space, carefully considering how customers will experience each element. Artificial lighting and daylighting elements can be used to create a particular feeling within a space or draw attention to a marketing element. A collaborative design team will consider all of these fundamental issues collectively when laying out the floor plan and create a space to support your business lines and communicate your brand identity.

Brand experience is an invaluable tool in the competition for attention among the deluge of messages that we are exposed to daily. Establishing a strong brand identity and communicating it through your retail architecture requires a collaborative partnership between the client, architect, interior designer and branding consultant. Early attention to the concepts and details that define a brand experience will help guarantee that your retail environment reinforces the value of your brand. ■

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