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Lessons from Walt Disney

Walt Disney's attention to detail - his attention to telling the Disney brand story in the proper light - overwhelms us. At the opening of "it's a small world" at the New York World's Fair, Disney, along with several children, poured bottles of water from all seven continents into the ride's water, making it truly and international attraction.

If you look very closely, the next time you visit Walt Disney World you will see Disney's many loving touches. And this was no easy task, considering that Walt himself never saw WDW in completion. The story goes that as Disney lay in the hospital on his death bed, he described his plans for the Florida Magic Kingdom to his brother Roy by pointing out locations on a ceiling tile ("The theme park goes here, EPCOT goes there ...") Roy came out of retirement to see that Walt's dream came true.

Sometimes the best ideas come to you in the most unlikely places. Disney does that for us - we filled four pages before we even left Main Street! Check out Disney's attention to detail and how each can translate to your own business:

* As you approach the front gates of the Magic Kingdom you are hit with the incredible colors of thousands of flowers, the smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, and Disney songs playing in the background. It's the guest's first 10 seconds of interaction that builds the perception they carry

with them into the park. You know how important a person's first 10 seconds in your store is - that tiny amount of time makes a lasting impression.

Go outside and look at your front door - right now. What's your customer's first impression of your store? Is it clean and fresh when they enter? Did you greet them with a smile?

* Main Street is said to be on a slight incline, rising up towards Cinderella Castle. It's not noticeable to guests entering the park for a day of fun, but they're grateful for that downhill walk to the parking lot at the end of a long day, even if they don't realize it's there.

Have you installed that ramp outside yet to help customers get their wheeled carts, strollers, wheelchairs and motorized scooters up and over the curb and into your store? Inside, are there places a customer can just sit and rest for a minute?

* If you look very closely, you will notice that the shops on Main Street get slightly smaller the closer you get to Cinderella Castle, making it loom even larger than it really is.

In retail language, this is called a "sight line". You can do a sight line like Disney's in your store, but you'll need to reverse it. The fixtures in your store should start out shorter, then get taller towards the rear of the store. If you want customers to see your entire store from the front door, this is the way to go.

* Look up at the shop windows and you will see the names of businesses and business people painted on the glass. Like the opening credits in a movie, this is Disney's tribute to the people who helped build The Magic Kingdom. Take a close look as you leave as well because you'll see closing credits too, including one for Walt himself.

You can do opening credits, too. Line your front windows with all of the cool things that you sell and do. Begin at the upper left hand corner and list your products and services in reflective, bright white 4" letters. Do this around the entire perimeter of each window - it's okay to repeat!

* Former President Ronald Reagan passed away just days before one of our visits to WDW, and the American flag at the front gate, as well as all of the flags outside of The Magic

Kingdom, was at half-staff. Inside the park the flags on top of the Main Street shops were all at full-staff. Thinking we had found a flaw in the Disney brand story, we asked a shop manager why these flags were not at half-staff as well. He explained that inside the gates of The Magic Kingdom, the outside world is, well, left outside. No matter what's happening in your personal life, or the world at large, Walt Disney World will always be the same happy place where you can check your troubles at the front gate.

Disney carefully safe guards their guests' experiences inside the park by making sure that experience is a direct reflection of the Disney brand. Similarly, the ambiance inside your store is a reflection of its - and your - personality. Can customers check their troubles at your front door? Is a customer's experience in your store a happy one where he or she can create to their heart's content?

* In Disney's world, customers are not customers, they are guests. We like that. Aren't the people who come to your store each day really guests? Shouldn't they be welcomed with the same courtesy that you welcome a guest in your own home? We think so, and from this point on, we've decided to refer to customers as guests. We think you should, too.

The famous "Partners" statue, shown in the photo above, depicts Walt Disney holding Mickey Mouse's hand, his other hand pointing off into the distance. The caption on the plaque is in Disney's own words, describing why he built his Magic Kingdoms: "I think most of all what I want Disneyland to be is a happy place where parents and children can have fun -- together."

That about sums it up... and isn't that why we all got into this business first place?

Continued Success,

Maria