



Kiosks such as this one for Gloria Jean Coffees may be standardized or modified depending upon location requirements.

Eight Steps to On Time, On Budget Fixture Programs

Opening a kiosk or designing a store fixture can be an extremely involved and time-consuming task. Here, Dave Willis breaks down the process and provides helpful hints for ensuring success for your business and design plans. (By Dave Willis)

Kiosk and store fixture implementation programs can be challenging for independent business owners and franchises. Generally after signing the lease and eyeing the opening deadline, the owner hires a general contractor and assumes that sub-contractors will take care of all their brand-defining details. If only it were that easy. Problems with this entrepreneurial approach tend to grow like that infamous downhill snowball. Some examples include:

A corporation develops a new retail concept, and the project manager is so focused on the look and design that all the other vital components lessen in significance.

The design may get rave reviews from all stakeholders, but be either unworkable or too costly for the allocated budget.

The mall or REIT (real estate investment trust—a security that sells like a stock on an exchange and invests in properties like malls or other shopping areas) refuses to approve the fixture.

A store package cannot be installed on-time.

Cabinets that were perfect elsewhere don't work here.

The source of all these difficulties is quite obvious, yet easily overlooked. What is missing is the need to correctly weave eight important components that are typically viewed as disparate. Failure to understand these interconnections is likely to lead to trouble in the form of delayed store openings and headache-inducing additional costs.

Eight Interrelated Components

Understanding the following eight interrelated components offers the best opportunity for an on-time on-budget opening:

Design — Design and layout do not exist in a vacuum. The owner needs to consider if the design is scalable, whether it will meet aesthetic needs, landlord requirements, utility demands and if the design can be readily manufactured and

launched at other locations if more than one site is planned.

Engineering — A wide range of considerations should be addressed to produce an efficient millwork package that meets brand and functionality requirements, addresses municipal and landlord requirements, codes and maintains design phase scalability.

Manufacturing — Manufacturing, even in a modular environment, has a number of variables and integral elements to address such as quality, consistency, punctuality and a comprehensive approach to inventory management programs.

Project management — This component, by its very nature, needs to be integrated with all others. Experienced project managers understand how to navigate the occasionally rocky paths of coordination with municipal offices for permits, inspectors, landlords and delivery and installation teams, and their impact on fixtures and execution. Managers need to accept that there are no separate entities in fixture creation.

Installation — Advanced and detailed coordination is essential. Installers need to have a direct line to the manufacturer for feedback. This is invaluable in developing more intelligent manufacturing that produces easier and less costly installation. Additionally, installations should always be performed by insured and trained craftsmen, who have working experience with the manufacturer's fixtures.

Shipping/Logistics — This is another example of a function that is improperly viewed as a separate entity. Planning needs to go beyond the attitude of “just pack it and ship it.” Failure to assure shipping requirements will result in a costly hit upon an already-squeezed budget with problems and costs compounding when more than one site is involved. Logistics required for supplying more than one franchise should be among the top priorities of the other seven components. Shipping is one of the most important considerations in supply chain management and should be a priority consideration for every business.

Ongoing maintenance — The need for consistent maintenance to assure an exceptional appearance and functionality over time is essential, particularly in the design and engineering phase to limit breakage and wear in the long term, which can save precious time and money.

Graphics/Signage — Graphics for our purposes go beyond delivering messages

through words and images. The concern here is how they relate to the fixture. Besides a proper fit, graphics should be changeable because new promotions and/or re-branding generally require new signs.

Common Pitfalls

When the impact of each component on the others is ignored, the owner or franchisee may experience a number of setbacks, most of which can be traced to the initial planning stages. For example, there may be a misconception about modular fixtures and kiosks, particularly their customization — a word not many associate with modularity. That can be a costly oversight. The one-size-fits-all approach may not work in every store because landlord requirements, codes and sizes are likely to vary with location. This sets the stage for early coordination between design/engineering, manufacturer and installer.

A general contractor's work may not be comprehensive in its oversight of sub-contractors. When this occurs, subcontractors tend to focus on individual areas of expertise and may inadvertently provide substandard work because there has been no serious effort at correlation. This is tunnel vision, and it demonstrates the perils of ignoring interrelationships.

Obviously, accountability is essential to address such issues, but that alone isn't enough. What is needed is a holistic approach through a single-source partner.

360-Degree Holistic Approach

Any discussion that includes "holistic" is bound to draw some raised eyebrows, but do not confuse this with New Age theory. It is, instead, a real world understanding of the benefits of comprehensive input. The holistic approach requires experienced analysis of all pieces necessary for on-time fixture installation followed by educating each individual to avoid narrow focus on one specialty.

One who can attest to its attributes is James Christian, marketing manager of institutional foodservice for Green Mountain Coffee Roasters of Waterbury, Vermont, a specialty coffee roaster. For its institutional foodservice, Green Mountain places its fixtures in satellite or off-peak day retail locations primarily in academic and healthcare venues. Christian recommends single-source planning through a turnkey approach.



"For those of us whose energy is directed to our own product and its development, having knowledgeable assistance from a turnkey service provider is a tremendous stress reliever." Christian said. "The quality of the fixture is certainly fundamental, but so is the pre-design consultation, the final review, and the installation. In other words, the final customer should be pleased with your provider's work in every aspect, as it is a reflection of you and your business."

Coordination of fixture planning, construction and installation is equally important for Bob Ryan, national operations director of The Mobile Solution, an exclusive dealer for T-Mobile. Ryan said he may order 10-20 kiosks at a time, and modifications may be necessary depending on location even though the kiosks are standardized.

"You need a turnkey provider who knows the landlord, the other vendors, the local rules and requirements and all associated data," Ryan said, "and then you need the communication and chemistry that comes with people really working together."

He acknowledged the occasional "monkey wrench" that can be thrown into the project, but "that's why you need the turnkey to handle unforeseen circumstances. Everyone has to be on the same page."

Equilibrium and Efficiencies

It is clear from the experience of The Mobile Solution and Green Mountain that any fixture or kiosk project needs to begin with a consultative approach to determine program development. Consideration during this critical information-gathering phase includes project direction and implementation of all parts not only in the new store but in future fixtures. It also takes a realistic look at the need for feedback from all eight components, which may be

best achieved through consolidation of vendors and contractors.

The holistic approach is efficient. Some of its benefits include helping corporations control the size of internal development and construction staffs, lessening the likelihood of exceeding the build-out budget, reducing time to the store opening by improving predictability and removing most unknowns, and creating manufacturing efficiencies that will be applied to future stores reducing costs in the long run.

Yardsticks Measure Success

The most successful retail expansions, including fixtures and rollouts, occur when all aspects of the process are equally considered. Ideally, the owner staffs accordingly with internal resources and partners. These are the people who have learned that development of the next retail location should never place individual expertise above group input and that contracting work should not be outsourced without consideration of accountability.

Hire a reputable company to handle the build out. Do your homework and shop around. It is important to understand that going with the cheapest price is not necessarily the best route to take, as it is a large investment. Make sure that the company that you hire takes you through the process and keeps you updated on a timely basis. Become totally involved with all aspects of the project. If you have the time to devote, act as the general contractor, this will save you many expenses. The company that you hire for the project may be able to recommend sub contractors or you may hire them on your own. Bottom line: stay involved and pay attention to detail.

Quality, budget and speed are the yardsticks that measure the success of an expansion. The holistic approach is designed to stand up to those measurements by alleviating worries about costs and installation and reducing delays. It may well be the difference between an on-time cost-efficient opening, and a problem-plagued drain on the budget. ■

Dave Willis is president of Kiosko, Inc., a leading manufacturer of high-quality retail fixtures complemented by complete turnkey services to facilitate the entire build-out process. For more information, Tel: +1 (866) 554-6756 or visit the website at www.kioskousa.com.