

Don't Wait, Renovate!



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IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE business landscape, it is imperative for retailers to stay fresh and relevant in the eyes of customers. Store environments that appear shabby and outdated lead to lackluster sales, wary shoppers and lower traffic. Yet for many storeowners, there is a genuine fear and loathing of store renovations, as the thought of facing the costs, design decisions and business disruptions inherent with a renovation are enough to make one pretend that the store really doesn't look so bad and that customers will continue to come through the front door to buy. (They won't.)

Spring is an excellent time to take a close look at the condition of your existing store presence and consider a simple refurbishment or perhaps a larger renovation. The good news is you do not have to be a large retail chain with an in-house design and construction team to plan an effective store renovation. Funding for any renovation project is always tight no matter the scale, and the return on investment should be carefully accounted for. The following checklist provides helpful reminders on how to keep store renovation plans on track and ensure the most in added value to your business.

PURPOSE: Start by determining what the business goals are for your renovation. Schedule a "think tank" meeting with your store team, including all business functions. Before you meet with a design or construction consultant, consider your objectives. Are you trying to enhance your brand or business image? Improve customer traffic? Increase sales? Elevate the customer experience? Expand product presentation space? Fix an operational or sales service issue?

LIFECYCLE: Consider what the anticipated lifecycle for the renovated store will be, as it can



affect how the project is designed and constructed. A realistic sense of the expected lifespan of your renovated store will help guide design and material decisions.

PRIORITIZE: Prioritize the estimated costs based on the benefit to the project purpose and what percentage of the budget will be customer-facing versus behind the scenes. This will help isolate out the "critical to have" versus "nice to have."

BUDGET EATERS: Set your budget, and then double it. Well, perhaps not exactly, but there are things about any renovation project that can dramatically affect costs. Refrain from structural modifications or significant changes to existing plumbing or electrical lines, as these items tend to take up significant portions of any budget and often require additional engineering expenses and permits. However, don't be afraid to consider a drastic change to how the store is currently laid out. Simple alterations to wall positions or ceiling heights and new lighting can dramatically change the look and function of a retail space.

MATERIALS & FINISHES: Ensure new materials and finishes are both durable and practical. Consider where each material will be in relation

to handling heavy traffic, cleaning, exposure to weather, etc. Will daily vacuuming chip the corner of the new POS counter? Will upholstery hold up to dirty hands?

WOW FACTOR: Identify at least one specific "wow factor" that the customer will be sure to notice—be it a visual or service improvement that enhances the shopping experience. Look for examples of creative, visual centerpieces that use inexpensive materials installed in unique ways. Research design publications, shop the competition—make note of what strikes you as you enter a retail or hospitality space.

STOREFRONT: Storeowners oftentimes forget to step outside and check out all the details of their own façade and entry (especially if they enter the store from a back entrance). Identify how the renovation will change the perception or interest of potential customers as they pass by.

THE PRODUCT IS THE HERO: The best store designs enhance rather than overwhelm the product. Ensure that your renovation allows the product to be the hero: to be both visually appealing and operationally easy to sell. This idea might lead to better decisions on where to spend available budget (e.g. improved lighting and new fixtures).

OPEN FOR BUSINESS: Verify how the renovation project can be approached in phases, off-hours or off-season, with minimal disruption to store hours. Ensure signage is clear for entrances and modified store hours—and that, yes, you are open for business. You might entice your customers with what's happening by posting the design plans. Make use of the disruption and have some fun!

PETER-TOLIN BAKER IS ACTIVELY INVOLVED WITH RETAIL DESIGN AND VISUAL MERCHANDISING VIA P-T B DESIGN SERVICES (OWNER), AND AS A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO *DESIGN+RETAIL*.