

10 STEPS TO A GREAT DESIGN

The last 25 years have witnessed a huge change in the pub and bar sector, not only in the UK but also worldwide. High standards are now taken for granted; very good is no longer good enough.

To compete you need to be remarkable. Customers are more likely to forgive indifferent food in a comfortable and stimulating environment than they are to forgive discomfort, no matter how good the meal. If you don't believe me, just look at McDonalds or Starbucks.

Of the many venues I've designed, a significant proportion never got off the drawing board because very few operators truly understood how to maximise the potential that remarkable design can provide. Yet, as we see, design is the most important contributor to success. Design can make or break a venue, and these are my top 10 tips for getting it right.



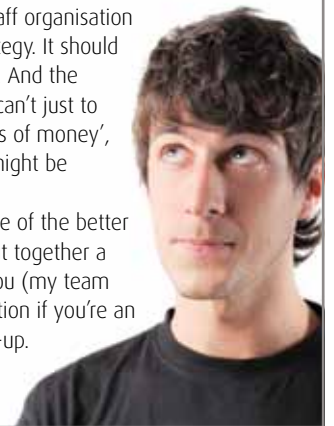
Nigel Witham is a chartered designer who has run his own practice for 25 years. He works mainly in the UK but travels frequently to the UAE and Australia. He also has permanent representation in New Zealand, New York and India. Find out more at www.nigelw.com. Nigel will be writing a monthly piece for Pub & Bar looking at design and how to get it right.

1

HAVE CLEAR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

If you don't know what you want to achieve no one in your team is going to work it out for you. You need a clear business plan with stated objectives. As a minimum it should include financial projections, competitor analysis, menus, staff organisation and marketing strategy. It should be well researched. And the business objective can't just be 'to make me lots of money', even though that might be what you want!

These days some of the better design firms can put together a business plan for you (my team can). It's a good option if you're an inexperienced start-up.



5

GET THE BRIEF RIGHT

Briefing a designer is a skill. Discuss with your designer what information they need from you and what they will obtain themselves. If you want to invest in technology get all the details together in advance.

Give your designer the information they want from you up front or you'll delay your own project. Gathering this information takes time so book it into your diary.

Make sure that the designer has negotiated with you for their creative freedom. Remember they are the designer, not you. You both need to know the boundaries to avoid mistakes or arguments that will compromise your design.

Remember that you are not the designer. It's easy to get carried away in the excitement and make bad choices. If you start to think you know best about design, please think again! Most of the clients that came to me over the years wanting me to draw up their pet designs failed. They only knew how to copy the last big thing, instead of how to design the next big thing. Consequently, they were always a step behind the market when they need to be a step ahead. They thought their business was about them, when instead it was about their customers.

6

FIND THE RIGHT PREMISES FOR THE DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES

The biggest misunderstanding about design is that you fit it to the premises. Many businesses are in the wrong size building or in the wrong location. Your designer should do up a prototype design based on a model building to work out how much space your business requires to achieve its objectives.

The designer should then help you choose premises that work with the design. Unless you are expanding a chain and you know what your business needs, never choose the premises before proving the design on paper. Location is less vital than you think. A bad design won't work in any location but a remarkable design will make up for a bad location.




7

GIVE THE DESIGNER ENOUGH TIME

It takes several months to design something properly. If you have to do it faster you're taking a huge gamble. Ignore what you think you see on TV makeover shows. Design is not like that.





2

KNOW YOUR STORY


You'll have to communicate what you're about to your customers. This is the foundation of building a brand and it means doing much more than slapping on a cheap logo. It means telling a story. Work out what your story is, what you stand for and why it is different and appealing, why you are remarkable.

3

GET THE NAME RIGHT

Choosing the right name for a new business is a critical. There are consultants who specialise in name selection. Consider carefully whether you should find one of them. It takes time and science, as well as intuition, to get names right and you may need to step away to get the right answer. At the very least, read up on the subject.

If you want your first outlet to expand into a chain you're going to need intellectual property rights. You need to check no one else has legally protected your chosen name already. This can take months.



4

HIRE A BUSINESS-MINDED DESIGNER

A professional, experienced, business-minded senior designer (as opposed to a junior designer or contractor) will understand your business objectives and how to create a remarkable new design that achieves them.

Some can help with name selection, branding and graphic design as well as all the architectural elements so that everything is properly coordinated and you only have one person to deal with.

8

ACCEPT THE TRUE COSTS OF IMPLEMENTATION

If you don't have the money to build the design right, what makes you think you'll have the money to build it again? Hire a quantity surveyor to price the design and if you can't afford it, wait until you can or accept your business plan is not viable. Believe me, I have seen many people ruin their finances by starting things they couldn't afford to finish. Paying for good advice on implementation costs may be the best investment you ever made.



9

ACCEPT HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE TO CONSTRUCT

It's going to take time to build. If you force the timescale you'll compromise the design and end up losing time and spending more money putting it right. If you haven't built anything similar before, ask those that have and listen carefully when they tell you how long it takes. Resist landlords that put you under pressure with short rent-free periods or be prepared to pay the rent until your outlet is ready, it's much cheaper in the long term.



10

NEVER, EVER HAVE A LAUNCH EVENT

Don't expose your business when you are still learning. Wait until it's working first, then have as big a party as you want. You probably won't need it by then but you'll certainly deserve it.

