

Service Design at McDonald's

An Interview with Denis Weil.



Denis Weil

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Denis' passion is to find new ways to use design methods to drive businesses. He likes to push the boundaries of integrating design into innovation. He is an adjunct professor at the Institute of Design in Chicago where he teaches classes in Service Design. His viewpoints on the value of design for innovation have been published in ID magazine and Business Week.

What are the elements that make the service at McDonald's what it is; besides an efficient supply chain that ensures quick service?

McDonald's was conceived as a take away, with three milestones stated in the value proposition of "Quality, Service and Friendliness Cleanliness" (QSC). The promise for the "service" proposition, which we are still focused on (and measure) today is, and has been historically, the key guiding principles that drove the service system—Fast, Accurate, and Friendly.

What are the methods you use to create your existing service offering?

As mentioned, we have been focused on the delivery of service rather than on how the delivery is experienced by

the customer. McDonald's has been a production centric company, where standardized speed, accuracy, and hospitality procedures were the focus. Service performance was evaluated by speed and accuracy of delivery. However, we did not have one hundred and thirty items on our menu when these parameters were valid. As the menus and business evolved, as they expanded and became more varied, we decided to update and review our service systems. Three years ago we set up a customer experience group, comprised of designers inside the company to work with our operational development group in designing our service systems by taking a holistic approach to the design of the McDonald's experience. The focus has evolved from just the delivery to examining both delivery and the perception of the entire McDonald's service experience.

How do you work with prototyping; why is it important?

In 1999, McDonald's created an innovation center where designers experiment with and test new products, including new kitchen equipment and designs. Currently, we are also using the center to prototype new kitchen designs and restaurant layouts and have real customers involved in simulating restaurant situations to test these new solutions.

Since prototyping new systems is something that we have taken up rather recently, the location of the innovation center limits our tests largely to American customers. But that is changing as we are exploring ways to recruit tourists in Chicago to test different cultural needs. (An innovative way of overcoming location restraints! Editors note.) For instance, the culture of queuing is very different in France than in the U.S., and these cultural behavior patterns do influence service design.

Front stage people at McDonald's are not well paid. Can Service Design make the working environment more rewarding and improve the service performance?

We have discovered a strong co-relation between the services that work for the customers and the staff. What they both

are looking for is organized efficiency with little or no chaos.

We are trying to reconnect our service staff with the innate pleasure of the ritual of serving food. In moments of pressure and stress, the staff tends to disconnect with this pleasure so we are trying to change that by creating more service rituals. This also helps to fulfill our ambition to create a pleasant experience for the customers. There are indeed some rituals that have survived through the history of McDonald's, like the double folding of the package with the logo facing the customer, when she receives his food

Have there been services that you benchmarked McDonald's against?

More than benchmarking, we work with typologies of services and then place ourselves in that spectrum. On one extreme of this spectrum is a bridal studio, where one is showered with attention and at the other extreme you could place a post office, where the experience is rather routine and homogeneous.

Thanks to Denis for the interesting insights into his work!

Denis Weil, Vice President, Innovation and Concept Development, at McDonald's Corporation, is responsible for the development of next generation customer experience and retailing concepts. Earlier, he honed his customer experience design skills in Product Development and Brand Management positions at Procter & Gamble and in an E-commerce business.

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