

TEAM-at-ONCE consulting – Theme Park Don't Do's



What ***not*** to do... in a 'real' theme park ! ??

A soft proposal for the ten commandments in real theme parks....

Observing many theme parks, and themed visitor attractions, leads to thinking them over again. While observing so many "must do's" being published to build the most successful theme park, my reflection has been that the application of those must do's most often still lead to average products. Are we missing something ?

I though: YES we're missing something.

We miss pointing to some of the common habits in building and operating theme parks, that should be banned, as they lead to a "most common average product" at best, by subtracting from all the expensive efforts of the must do's, invested in the first place...

Reviewed, explained, and proposed...

**Your Neighbour is not the standard.
You stand out !
Not by doing "more" but by being different !**

If this is a leading thought.....

Then, here comes the 10 commandments, of...

What ***not*** to do !

Be aware !

Some of the commandments could be shocking to the industry !



I

Table of *Basic concept* commandments

1/ Don't do any blatant copying, nor any weak lookalikes

My 1st Wild Guess : every year, some park is named or sued for IP-rights infringements

My 2nd Wild Guess : 50% or more of parks operate pityfull bad ripp-off's of some good original

The most elementary of all commandments. IP rights infringements are naturally low; mean and bring you legal trouble. Besides the "case", you're labeled as 'thief' within the whole industries' gossip. Copy your neighbours unique attraction, and your "bad name" is made forever...(even if no case was introduced.before court)

At the limit of blatant copy, we often see ripp-offs from the neighbour's successful prime attraction. Don't do this either. You position yourself as suffering from "desperate imagination weakness", and the ripp off attraction usually is regrettable trash, next to the original, thus fixing your product on the market as listed third grade forever. Your customers DO compare, and mind you, they KNOW the original, even if it's at the other side of the world...

* **IP-rights infringements = a cardinal sin, and a fatal stupidity !**

* **Making it "bigger" doesn't help.**

* **The size of the *Ugly Duck* will not transform it into a *Gracefull Swan*, ever.**

2/ Avoid buying 'every' product off the shelf , and, do not try to be *just* "Bigger", "Faster", "Higher"...

My 1st Wild Guess : + 90% of parks buy off the shelf, many do this even with 100% of their rides...

My 2nd Wild Guess : + 50% of parks are trapped in the "we must have the bigger one" spider web...

Although the majority of amusement parks are just doing that, it is positioning them in the eternal Rat's Race. Although it is understandable and even logic up to a certain level, with most non-story-driven amusement parks, it should be avoided totally at 'real' theme parks.

In the Rat's Race logic, to position yourself to your neighbours, you need to do it "bigger", and/or with more expensive (faked) theming glued onto the standard ride, to make it more shiny... because you only got what "they", your competitors, actually already have as well !

Superlatives fix you on an purely material magnitude scale. It's impossible to free yourself, once you've been fixed, because one day or another (next year or... *Hurray*... only the year after?) your neighbour has something bigger again. Building *solely* on material superlatives, is in the first place seriously capital consuming and shortlived at the same time. Excellent for ride building companies, but not very budget-intelligent towards the park venture.

Buying off the shelf makes you "average" at best. The Rat's Race never ends, swallows capital, like a top quality sponge sucks water, just to be squeezed out in the drain right after.

3/ Do not stick to tired conceptual templates

My Wild Guess : + 75% of parks adhere to such tired templates, especially regarding "themes"...

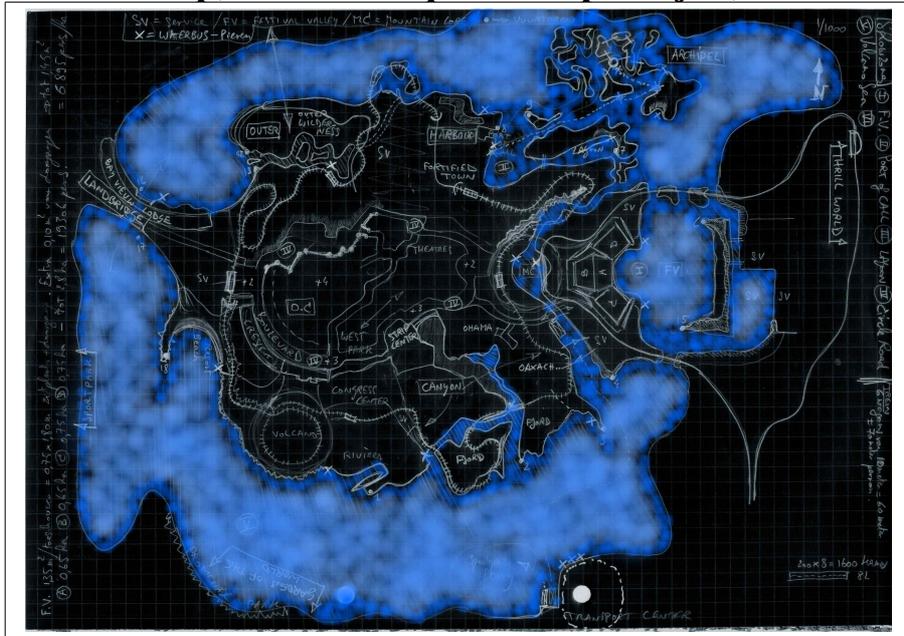
Concept templates, are the "non cash sensible" variant of the "off the shelf product purchase".

Concept templates are usually freely available, circulate in the air, thus attracting owners/operators to re-use them, at a basic non-creative level. In fact, templates are even used by attraction builders, for their standard products, which they sell "off the shelf". In this way, several manufacturers bring "more of the uninspirational same". The difference between templates & IP-infringement copying is just that there is no copyright trap glued to the concept template.

Well... this is another instance of "Zero-Imagination" business.

Instead of collecting templates to pick your uninspired likes from, now get all of your *concepts* developed professionally & uniquely.

We can help, it's a concept developers' job, after all !



TEAM-at-ONCE has a development policy

..... we have something *different* to offer,
something priceless : bringing distinguishable uniqueness,
so that you're *not* the slightly modified copy of your neighbour,
not even his temporary upgraded version,
but *will* be remembered as... *yourself* !!
Even if the attraction is very modest....

II

Table of *Concept & Design Development* commandments

4/ Do not build one-layer only attractions

My Wild Guess : + 50% of parks are ...

Real theme parks need richly multi-layered attractions. Revisiting must add new experience elements to the visitor's memory. Plain repeating is boring. It's up to: detailing, layered plots, variant ride versions...

* **Always build attractions with genuine rewarding revisiting strenght in mind.**

* **We can discuss a wide range of options from design side, to accomplish multi-layered attractions.**

5/ Do not invest in stuff a customer can have at home (soon)

My Wild Guess : + 50% of parks have several attraction concepts, customers CAN have at home...

What is the point of making investments in a form of entertainment that the customer can have at home, right now, next year, or in the near future !? The size really doesn't matter. It is not because you can do it "Bigger" at the park then what a customer can have at home (home cinema screens also grow bigger..), that this would be a decent argument saving your business investment.

The expectation of 5 years "impossible-to-have-it-at-home", seems to be a minimum requirement to me, considering any investment. I suppose I should be flexible when saying this, but rather upwards, as the time running between the moment the idea comes up, descision to invest is made, and the moment of the grand opening in the park, must be added to the 5 years... Even 15 years, from a first goal date, could trick your business soon, with customer ratings such as "it's a stupid trivial show".

My recommendation is: "Study the developments in the home entertainment market well, then Don't do similar things AT ALL". And, keep in mind : 5 years is "nothing counted from now".

6/ Refrain from "Virtual" unless it's adding to real-reality

My Wild Guess : + 90% of parks do "Virtual", just for the supposed hype, not for the added value...

I am possibly making a very controversial comment in the actual industry, here. Virtual is a hype. Regardless of it's possibilities, it is mostly sold, installed & marketed for it's "technological appeal". We see endless marketing around 3D, 4D, 5D... eh?? Why not 7D ?? (meaningless sales pitch designations) I fancy to advocate, the experience content must come first. Technology only should HELP in the blurred background to get the experience pipelined into the wanted make believe level.

Most virtual tech however, is just promoting itself. The tech, from the tech-boys-wet-dream-vision..., NOT the actual real visitor experience, lasting in memory.

I advocate NEVER to market the technology used (whatever technology), virtual or not. Only go for the essential : "Market only the make-believe real-reality *story* or *emotional* experience" !

I love making this comparison, where the imagineer is the ultimate professional storyteller, namely a magician ! The magician's trick secrets can be the most exquisite state of the art in imagineering, but he never will reveal the technology ! The technology serves the show, will remain secret, THUS is magic ! Reveal and market the "tech" and you kill the magic show... It is time ALL tech imagineers are going to understand this very truth and wisdom, and in these years, it especially applies to "Virtual" technologies. They kill down their own "magic", by marketing it at every corner of the street. That is damned wrong ! So.... **PROTECT the magic, by never revealing it ! Use virtual, as make believe sustainer only.**

7/ Do not show ugly sides in a 'real' theme park

My Wild Guess : near to 100% of parks are making this error at least a few times, even if some excell...

When planning for attractions or a whole park, all efforts going into very carefull 'total theming' can be lost at uncarefull, haphazardly, showing ugly sides. Any of the sides: sideways-sides, back-sides, in-sides, roof-sides... Especially when it comes to the stretch of a 'total theming budget' on industrial type bearing constructions. And, when it comes to bringing in technical installations, not planned in concept phase. Check every possible visitor viewpoint, from close positions, distant positions, outside perimeter, and also from random ride vehicles passing through.

It goes actually further then just the ugly faces of the buildings around. Visual "cross contamination" of different themed zones in a park are a negative as well. And, non build anomalies within the theming execution. And, even your pavement can be the forgotten ugly face.

(More insights can be gained at my "total theming" checklist guidelines. Article, and design help.)

Never it must be possible to get the slightest glimpse of any "ugly face" of the park's premises.

It happens
to the very best...



III

Table of *Operational* commandments

8/ Do not ask money for stuff you actually can't deliver

My Wild Guess : + 25% of parks still ask full money, while failing to deliver the promised fun...

There are perhaps some exotic instances of mishaps through not delivering the fun, but one of the most common situations occur at many parks. At first there is the fixed price day entrance system. People pay for an expectation in accordance with the listed attraction possibilities. Peak day, with excessive crowding, occurring in some parks, can result in a drastic decimation of the number of attractions one visitor can enjoy during that day. Standing in line all day, and getting on to 5 rides only, compared to a swift waiting time and an easy 12 attractions on a calm day, will not leave a positive impression on your audience. "Just fair" would be to (just examples) rebate the ticket price on disastrous peak days, or offering that a peak day ticket, will allow free entrance for the person on a low season day as bonus... (my personal favorite) or, or... It is not my purpose to get into details for solutions, I hereby just want to get the attention on the fact, there are quite some instances when a product is sold at full price, while it actually cannot be delivered. Don't do this, ever.

Build a pricing policy that keeps the faces smiling, especially when things go wrong, one day.

9/ Do not market yourself better then you are

My Wild Guess : + 50% of parks are bluffing, without being concious about the negative impact...

Visitors receive all of the marketing messages well. Usually, marketing is excelling in raising high expectations, as these expectations attract crowds, isn't it ?

Really excelling attractions (the best on earth...) are both rare AND dazzling costly. Is that case, the chances are small that they would get a bad effect from some overrating in marketing.

But in average conditions, what if the 'bravoure' of the words is not matched by reality? **Deception !**



The far majority "word of mouth" communication, is about comparing *the expectations raised by marketing* , with *the reality met when visiting the place*. It accounts for both positive and negative word of mouth.

The reasons behind failing to produce positive word of mouth can be three-fold:

- 1- The attraction is just bad, ranked on a '*world wide quality scale*'. If this is the case, no marketing ever will be able to walk around it.
- 2- The attraction is ranking OK to Good on a '*world wide quality scale*' but the marketing is promising a higher ranking then actually produced on site.
- 3- The attraction is ranking OK to Good on a '*world wide quality scale*' but the marketing is bluntly giving or suggesting misinformation (like something different, which is not at display at all) about the experience actually provided. (Even without over-rating it. "Come and see the gorillas", when it's actually a colony of baboons...)

Strangely, although *'the attraction should be better than the promise'* should be the only way to walk, most marketing bells & whistles seem to overrate attractions over and over again. It seems that the marketing people go wild, once they get a task at hand, and become *fantasy story writers* as if *their* marketing was the real product !

You can't blame them in a case 1- scenario.

You must have the guts to blame them, in the case 2- and 3- scenarios however. Stop the campaign before it's public. Screw it down in a quite decisive way, to get it back on track.

And last but not least: screw yourself down in a quite decisive way, if you, owner/operator, were pushing the marketing team to commit overrating or bluntly provided misinformation.

Know what your product is really about & worth. Strictly never overrate it in your marketing.

10/ Do not fake staff emotions in operation. Be genuine.

My Wild Guess : if too many parks indeed still fail to guarantee bringing the minimum standards in visitor service and reception, then at the other side of the spectrum, also +30 % of parks bring a faked emotions variant of an artificially screwed up operational policy.

Opposite to the 'all American' attitude, as with Disney as a leading model, I advise reasoningly well against this total show based on faked emotions. Im saying this with *Europe* in mind, I must admit ! But consider, most of Europe has a widely spread socio-cultural foundation of valueing a genuine human behaviour, not the all pre-programmed opera of 'emo spiels'.

I know this will perhaps be the most controversial item from my proposal for 10 commandments, because so many voices still worship '*Holy Disney*'. We have actually seen that Disney show-faking attitudes really did upset the staff (I explicitly avoid the word 'cast', as the staff was opposed to the tsunami of American based individuality suppressing rules!) at *Euro Disney* during the first few years after opening, leading to a (forced) cancellation of this American import, and respecting the European socio-cultural values at last. (It was fought before court... and won by the staff.)

We're dealing with people, people always live in a specific culture, *be aware of that !*

In Europe, we appreciate basic genuine friendliness and helpfulness, without the trained plastic smile. In Europe, we should do our best to bring the visitor real comfort by making things easy for them, but by silently working at it, not by advertising "everybody is happy" at every corner of the street, every song through the speakers and every website page you open. In Europe, customers are really done with artificial corporate happiness indoctrination, it does not appeal.

We should be simply helpfull in relation to the human needs, through personal understanding, not in relation to a showmanship's checklist.

In short: This is about bringing in genuine staff identity, based on respect for individual differences. A genuine staff identity, will shine off into the excelling reception of the visitors, automaticaly. It should stay far away from sorts of artificial template corporate identity.

The staff makes the company. Don't impose a fake corporate identity on them.

Allow the staff to be genuine individual "human", even when playing a role.