



Drive-Thrus Driving Business

DRIVE-THRU VISITS ARE ACCELERATING FAST

We Are Creative Fabricators



ROOTED IN OVER 35 YEARS

of craftsmanship, creativity and innovation, we work with restaurants to create an unforgettable customer journey, both in-store and outside. As experienced storytellers, we have mastered the art of communicating and fostering your brand through an emotional connection to the restaurant environment.

A single-source leader in design, value-engineering, fabrication and implementation, we can utilize your existing program — or design a new one — and create a flexible, value-driven visual communication package that can easily be duplicated, kitted and rolled-out, or inventoried for later, effectively setting you up for continued growth.



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EXTERIOR ZONE STRATEGY

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TIME-STARVED DINERS ARE HUNGRY FOR BOTH GREATER CONVENIENCE AND GOOD QUALITY FOOD, AND THEY'RE CONVERGING ON DRIVE-THRUS BY THE BILLIONS.

Many fast casuals and quick service restaurants (QSRs) find that well over half of their business comes from the drive-thru.¹ So why aren't more restaurants investing more heavily into the exterior experience?

Some are: Starbucks and Panera Bread, for example, are relative newcomers to drive-thrus, but they're investing aggressively and, consequently, driving up competition.

Why? It's all about the economics, which are potentially huge. The NPD Group estimates that 50 to 70 percent of fast-food sales happen in the drive-thru lane, and this is in an industry that does over \$200 billion in annual sales across more than 240,000 locations.²

The economics, in turn, are all about the experience, which is everything to a brand. Research has shown that the customer experience can measurably enhance pleasure. Visual experiences can increase pleasure by 20%; visual plus auditory adds 48% more; visual,

auditory, and interactive increases pleasure by an astounding 80%.

That leads back to the bottom-line: companies that invest in design see 22% higher sales growth than non-investing companies.

Many Fast Casuals and QSRs pour an enormous amount of time, money, and effort into the interior customer experience with a focus on bolstering customer engagement, loyalty, and spending. But, astonishingly, they let poorly conceived drive-thrus languish. This is what companies like Starbucks and Panera Bread have come to realize: QSRs that fail to move forward with their drive-thrus are putting the brakes on future growth and competitiveness. Altogether, a carefully designed and branded experience can yield significant rewards.

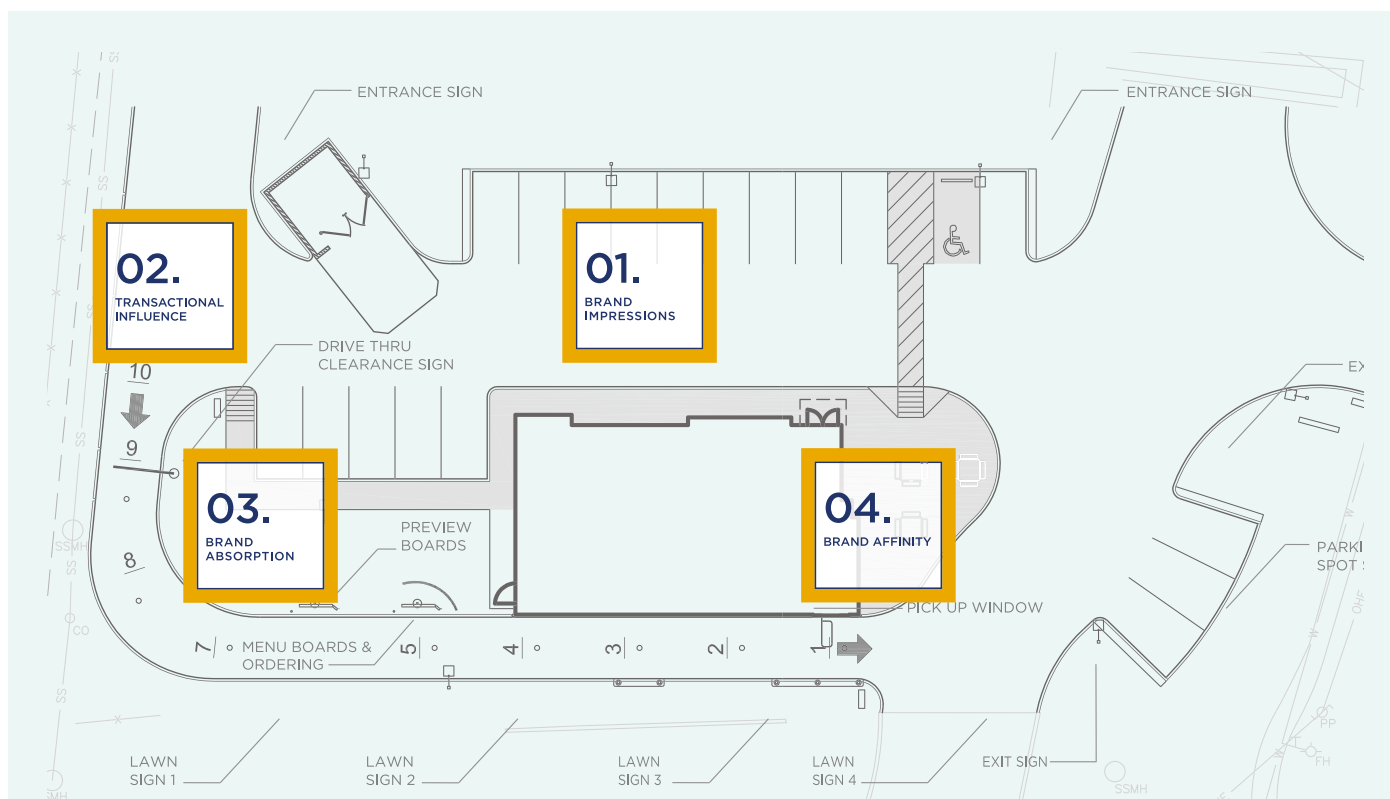
But what's the recipe for a good drive-thru experience? This paper will answer that question in detail.

Making the Most of the Drive-Thru: Experience is just as important as—if not more than—speed & accuracy.

FORTUNATELY, MAXIMIZING YOUR DRIVE-THRU IS MORE STRAIGHTFORWARD THAN IT MAY SEEM: THE KEY IS SIMPLY TO EXPORT YOUR INDOOR BRAND EXPERIENCE TO THE EXTERIOR.

With a carefully designed system, you can create the perfect balance of speed and satisfaction; you can also temper perceived wait times by engaging customers with the brand. Plus, exterior branding provides

convenient and cost-effective options for both upselling and presenting promotional material and mouth-watering food imagery.



Exterior Zone Strategy: Beefing Up the Drive-Thru Experience

The design of an experiential drive-thru encompasses multiple zones. This paper will walk through each, examining how exterior elements like changeable graphics, plentiful marketing real estate, and digital media components (including digital menu boards) can take customers on a pleasing and profitable journey through your unique brand.

01. BRAND IMPRESSIONS

The Approach: Before the Drive-Thru

YOUR BRAND'S CHANCE TO MAKE A STRONG FIRST IMPRESSION.

In addition to making guests feel welcome, this zone should start setting expectations relative to your unique offering.

This zone offers the first moment of engagement with your customers: they look at your building and entrance and decide whether to proceed or go across the street. Remember, first impressions are formed in just seven seconds.³ The approach to your restaurant must be immediately inviting and clearly direct people to the drive-thru.

It also needs to accurately reflect your brand. Foundationally, the drive-thru experience must emphasize speed, convenience, and accuracy; but it must also create an aesthetic experience that whets the appetite for *your* offering.

Be Clear

Strategically placed welcome signs guide customers to the drive-thru entrance, while additional signage promotes the latest limited-time offer (LTO) or seasonal offering.

Use Lawn Signage

Most likely, the interior of your restaurant is filled with appetizing images and promos designed to get the stomach rumbling. Do the same for your exterior and get people into that drive-thru because they need that juicy, delicious meal *right now*. Most restaurants have a lot of room for improvement



here—Futuresource Consulting suggested in 2014 that just one percent of the potential market for outdoor displays had so far been tapped.⁴

Make the Drive-Thru Distinctive

From messaging on the pavement to branded clearance bars and banner signage, a full entry “portal” is significant to the overall drive-thru design. A clear, inviting path, for instance, helps curtail confusion and anxiety.

02. TRANSACTIONAL INFLUENCE

Entering the Drive-Thru

MAXIMUM COMMUNICATION AND PROGRESSIVE MARKETING PRESENTED IN BITE-SIZED PIECES BUILD BRAND AWARENESS, INCREASE MARKET BASKET, AND ENABLE CONSUMERS TO MAKE CHOICES EASILY.

Your interior is likely laden with signage and promotional materials convincing visitors which meals they want to order, which upsells to add, etc. It's all goal-driven: spend more and come back more often. But for most drive-thrus, patrons are lucky to get a preview screen. The drive-up to the drive-thru should be just as goal-driven as the interior. For example, let's say you want to increase average check. The elements of the drive-thru—signage, graphics, banners, displays—can heavily impact this metric.

Think About Future Visits Today

Today's drive-thru experience should be sufficiently appealing to encourage a return. This means improving the aesthetics of the situation (hide those dumpsters, please!) and differentiating the experience. For example, Panera's drive-thru might reinforce the wholesomeness of their meals; Jack in the Box's might feature a fun, entertaining aesthetic. Highlight meals to try with promos.

Ease Their Decision-Making

"Decision fatigue" is a psychological phenomenon that can make it more difficult for diners to make fast, good decisions on the spot.⁵ This has implications for drive-thrus: the decision-making process becomes stressful for the diner, and it can increase wait times as they dither.



Help them out with materials that guide them toward specific meal choices.

Direct Traffic Patterns

If there's any risk of confusion, use something like a secondary clearance structure in Zone 2. It also provides a good spot for a promotional banner or sign to highlight an LTO or upsell.

At the Order Station

IMMERSE YOUR CUSTOMERS IN THE BRAND CULTURE. ANSWER THE QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR? USE ZONE 3 TO BUILD AWARENESS OF YOUR OFFERS, INCLUDING SPECIAL SERVICES LIKE CATERING, DELIVERY, OR A NEW APP.

Now we come to the meat of the drive-thru: the order station itself. What is your value to your customer? Here, you emphasize and reinforce your brand, whether it's the quality of the food; a fun, cool place to dine-out; or a special feature like sustainability. Consider this situation: organic, sustainable QSRs are burgeoning across the country. Today, you might be the only spot in town offering grass-fed burgers, and Sue may be willing to drive past the Pizza Huts and Taco Bells to reach you. But what happens when a Lyfe Kitchen opens just down the road from her?

Use the drive-thru experience to emphasize your credentials as a restaurant fully committed to the values of your brand. For example, instead of settling for a simple canopy to keep the rain off drivers, use an inverted canopy that collects rain water for landscaping and irrigation. Incorporating solar panels into your design also helps to cut operating costs while boosting your branding as a sustainable, “green” destination. Differentiate your drive-thru from the competition in a way that aligns with your brand, and you’ll keep Sue coming back for more.

Get Creative

For example, Starbucks is adding live video sessions so customers can see who’s filling their order. “It’s about that customer-barista connection,” a Starbucks spokesperson has said. “There’s just a little bit more personal interaction in the drive-thru experience when you have the video screen.”⁶ Such digital displays can also be used as, or to complement, order confirmation screens that increase order accuracy.

Catch the Eye

Digital displays also rock in the drive-thru. Bright, colorful content that moves or changes in real-time catches the eye and stokes the memory. For example, live streaming social media feeds—fueled by customer content—both engage and entertain customers while they wait.

Go More Mobile

Integrate the drive-thru experience with your brand’s mobile app. Use GPS-enabled technology to feed special offers to nearby drivers; or enable them to interact with the ordering and/or payment process through their mobile phone.

Personalize the Experience

Along the same lines, you can also offer personalized promos and experiences that tailor every visit to the individual customer.

Watch Physical Placement

Pay attention to the ergonomics of how drive-thru elements, like the speaker post, are placed. Is your customer in a small car or a large SUV? Addressing these details will help reduce frustration and promote order accuracy.



04. BRAND AFFINITY

At the Window and Beyond

“CLOSE THE DEAL!” NOW THAT YOU HAVE EFFECTIVELY DELIVERED UPON CUSTOMERS’ EXPECTATIONS, YOU WANT TO TURN THEM INTO FANS OF THE BRAND. COMMUNICATE PRODUCT QUALITY, KEY DIFFERENTIATORS, AND MISSION STATEMENTS AS WELL AS BOUNCE-BACK MESSAGING.

At long last, we come to both the payoff and the payout alike: the payment window. The design implications of the drive-thru do not end at the order station. Rather, it’s important to think strategically about how to incorporate technology at every point in the drive-thru experience to satisfy customer expectations.

The VGS 2015 Restaurant Survey Report found that the presence of drive-thrus influences over half of diners aged 18 to 35 to visit; in turn, most are willing to wait up to 5 minutes (see Figure 1). But as the quality of the food ramps up, so do the wait times; and nowhere is that more apparent to the diner than at the payment window before their food arrives. Restaurants that unnecessarily eat into their diners’ personal time may suffer for it. Instead, use the drive-thru experience to entertain and educate.

Emphasize “Our Food is Worth the Wait!”

As mentioned earlier, “social spotlight” screens can offer real-time filtered social media feeds that display glowing comments about your food and your brand.

Grab the Customer’s Attention & Don’t Let Go

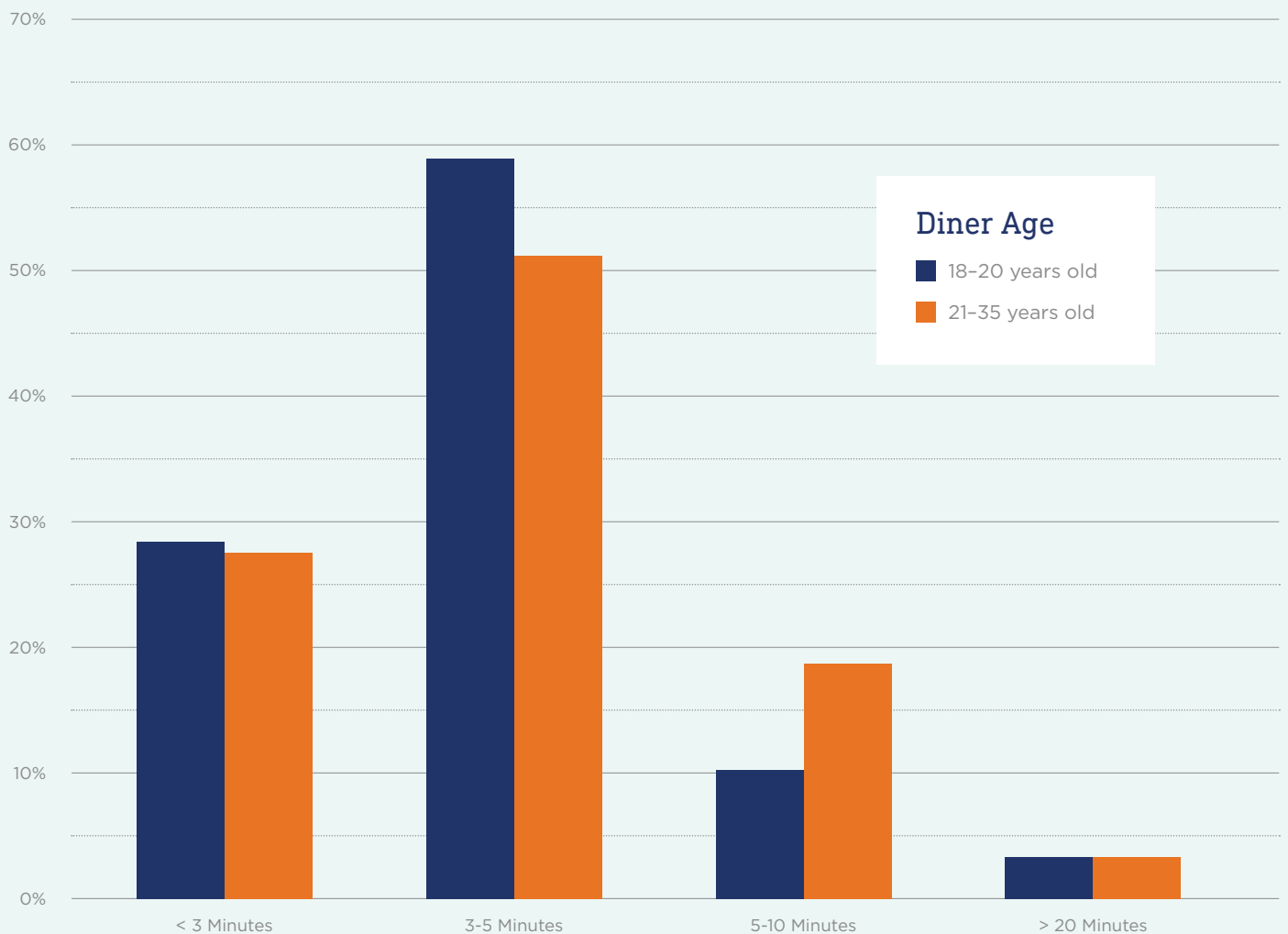
From handing out menus for return visits, to including coupons and promotional offers in the bag, effective communications help close the transaction in a positive way.

Finally, Explicitly Encourage Returns

Bounce-back signage near the end of the drive-thru lane serves as motivation for customers to come back again.

FIGURE 1

What is an acceptable amount of time to wait for a drive-thru order?



Source: VGS 2015 Restaurant Survey Report

CONCLUSION

Cook up a full exterior design flow, not just a cool experience.



USE YOUR DRIVE-THRU TO: BOOST METRICS OF SUCCESS, DELIVER A PERSONALIZED EXPERIENCE, INCREASE CONSUMER CONFIDENCE, REINFORCE CUSTOMER LOYALTY, REDUCE PERCEIVED WAIT TIMES, PROMOTE BRAND MESSAGING, AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CO-BRANDING.

Ask yourself: what kind of experience are your drive-thru patrons actually getting? Given that 60%-70% of business comes from outside, you need to be thinking about this experience, especially for Fast Casuals and Quick Service Restaurants trying to compete in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

Ask yourself a powerful question: 'Is my brand experience distinct enough that if I removed all the

signage from my building and drive-thru, would the customer know they were at my restaurant, versus any other restaurant in the area...?' As former Jack in the Box chief marketing officer Keith Guilbault has said, "Every single day we are looking at delivering a great experience for the customer, because the expectations are increasing. That's definitely something that is on our radar every single day." Is it on yours?

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SOURCES:

¹ QSR Mag, Oct 2015

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⁷ QSR Mag, Oct 2015

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