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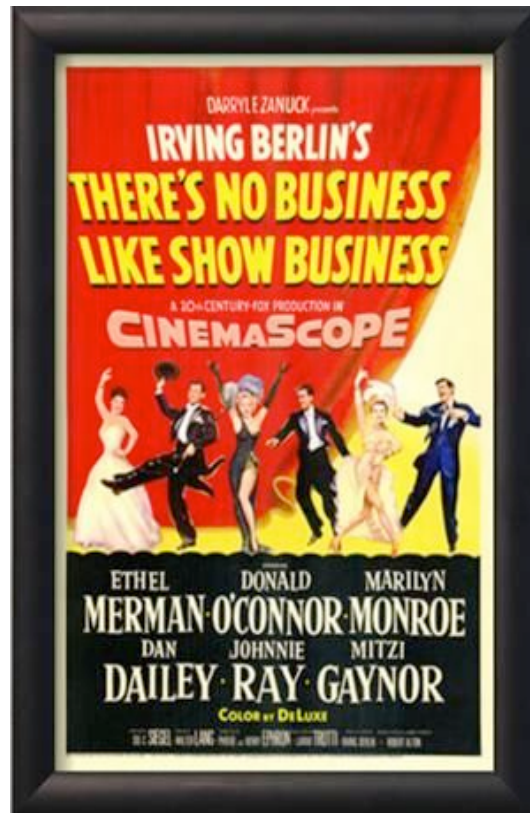
showbusiness tools for your business

A THEATRICAL APPROACH TO EXPERIENCE DESIGN

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experiencedesign.de

PROLOGUE: BUSINESS **SHOW** BUSINESS?

Everyone is talking about the *experience* economy, customer *experience* management, and **experience design** these days. The big idea is, in a world where all products are pretty good and all services are fairly decent, *any one of them* do the job well enough. So offerings become interchangeable - or *commoditised* - and can only compete on price.



To avoid this trap, people are thinking less and less about the product or the service, and more about the complete customer **experience** - the way our customer *perceives* his contact with us, and the emotions that the experience invokes. Good experience design can really make your offering stand out from the pack, and command a better price. And with great experience design, you can even turn customers into fans who will keep coming back - and tell their friends.

SO, WHERE DO WE FIND GOOD EXPERIENCE DESIGN?

The importance of good experience design is clear - but how do we “do” it? Luckily for us, there is an industry that is already expert in using perceptions to create emotion (and to make fans). We need only look to the world of **show business**. From prehistoric storytellers up to Hollywood blockbuster directors, showbiz folks have been engaging our senses to move our hearts for thousands of years. And over the centuries they’ve discovered many **tools** that can be applied on stage, on screen - or easily adapted to shoe-shops, dental surgeries, websites, hotels.... In short, wherever an experience is designed.

Here are **twelve of those tools.**

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Act I, Scene 2. *The making of*

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COMING SOON... / EPILOGUE

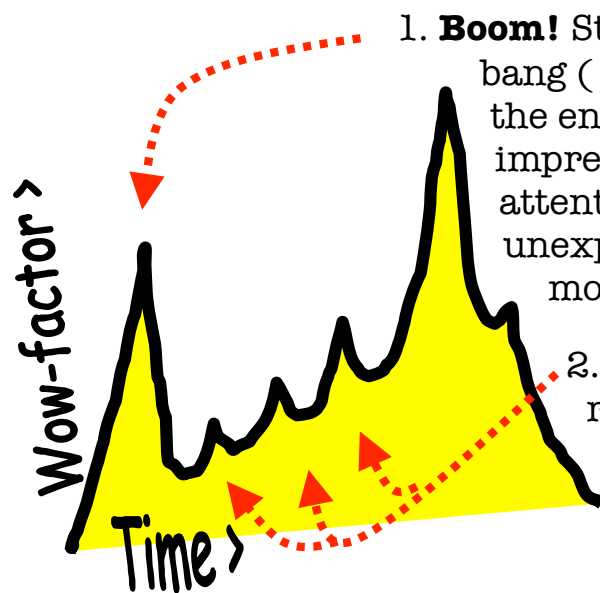
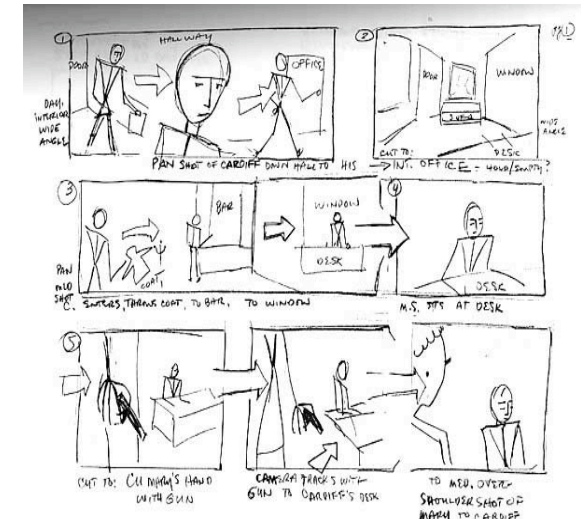
ACT I: **SCRIPTING** THE EXPERIENCE

Act I, Scene 1. Storyboarding: Boom-wowwow-BOOM!

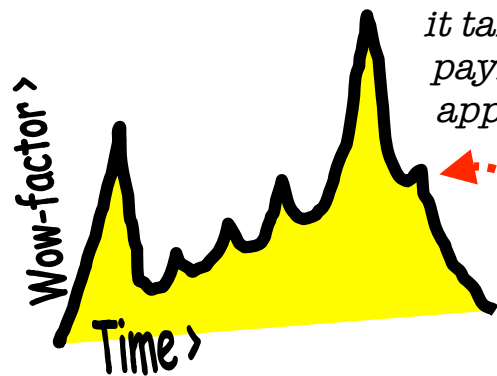
...arranging your highlights for maximum effect...

Plan (and cast) your customer contact scene by scene. It's not enough just to throw what you have together and let the customer choose: a talented experience director will **storyboard** a set of experiences that fit together like the parts of a great movie and build up to a memorable climax.

Try this effective structure, as seen in every James Bond adventure:



1. **Boom!** Start your customer's experience with a bang (but not your biggest bang, save that for the end). A bang can be anything that impresses your customer and grabs their attention. It could be a dramatic entrance design, an exceptional welcome, an unexpected gift. The best bangs are made by quite simply giving the customer more than they expect.
2. **Wow-Wow-Wow!** Now continue with a range of highlights, with periods of relative calm between them. Ideally, each of the unique highlights should be a little more impressive than the last, building excitement and even suspense. The quieter interludes between let the customer absorb the unfolding experience, or perhaps talk about it with others.

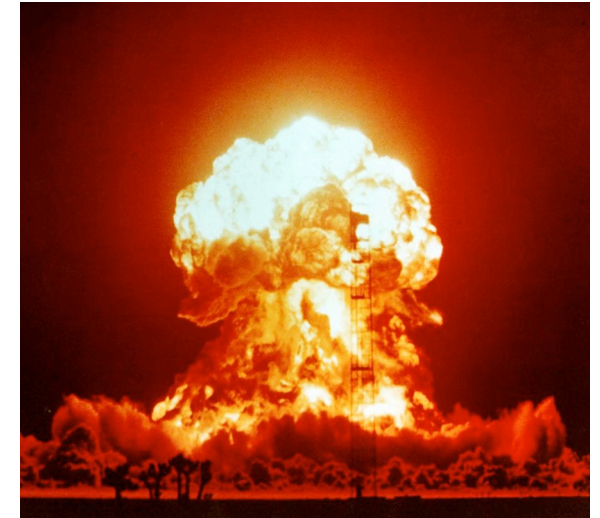


3. **BOOM!!** Round off with the killer highlight, the absolute best that you can give the customer. This could be the captain's ball, the moment where the new haircut is unveiled (complete with complimentary voucher for the portrait photographer), the round of applause and champagne send-off when the customer drives away in her new car, or the plumber vacuuming and dusting their work area - and leaving a rose and a chocolate.

(Here's a thought - most customer experiences finish not with a highlight, but with the worst part of all - handing over the cash. Can you avoid having this downer as your last impression? Could it take place at another time, like in a prepaid holiday? Better yet, can you make payment into a positive experience - perhaps reframing it as an exchange of appreciation?)

3a. **Ahh! (Bonus!)** Give the customer a little human moment as part of the wind down, to leave them with a smile. Perhaps it's a reason to smile as they leave, maybe a follow-up call or a birthday card six months later. It can be of monetary value (vouchers?), but the human factor is most important.

For more on Boom-wowowow-BOOM! and what James Bond can teach us about scripting customer interaction, click [here](#).



Act I, Scene 2. The making of

...showing hidden values...

People are genuinely interested in what goes on behind the scenes (why else do we watch so many “*making of*” documentaries?). Great! Because this interest gives you a chance to show off **hidden values**.

Imagine a visit to the dentist. She scratches around in your mouth for a few minutes, drills a bit, fills the hole, and charges you a couple of hundred bucks. How much? A couple of *hundred*? Ow! The pain in your wallet is worse than your aching gums!



Would it take away some of the financial sting if you knew that the chair you are sitting in cost \$6000, that the dentist trained for four years at a top school, and that in the next room two highly trained technicians were working on your filling mix? Perhaps the dentist can – discretely – show off some of these hidden values. What about a glass wall between the waiting room and the lab where all the fancy equipment is working away? What about some information on how dentists are made? And what about introducing you to the whole expert team – in person or as photos?

Think about ways that you can tell your customer what they are *really* getting for their money, and how you can modestly show off your own qualifications, history and investment. Of course, some parts of your offering should probably remain unseen - see “Backstage and exits”, but in general we are all happier paying more if we understand what lies **behind** our bill.



Act I, Scene 3. Prequels and sequels

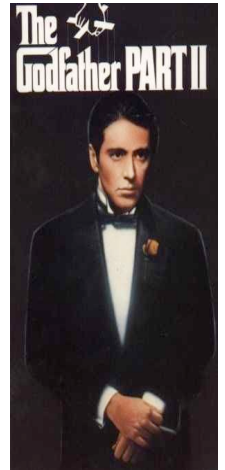
... surprising the customer when least expected...

When does your customer contact begin? When they first talk to a salesperson? When they enter the premises? When they are looking for a parking spot? When they see your ad in the paper?

And when does the contact end? When the till closes on the customer's money? When they leave the store? Or when they get your thank you note or follow-up call weeks (and years!) later?

One of the best ways to wow customers is to give them something when they do not expect it – something **outside** the normal span of your business contact. So extend your customer care both ways, and surprise your customers before and after the event. It can be very soon after your contact, like the *CrazyPrices* stores in Northern Ireland who will run out to give you a new bottle of milk if you drop yours in the car park; or at a distant point in time, like the wildly successful *Mitchell's* sales associates who know their customer's wife's and kids' birthdays, and who never forget to send them cards. (Automatic birthday messages from a computer are a yawn, but *genuine* ones from a thoughtful person are a surprise - and that makes them very different...)

Remember that **anticipation** is among the strongest, deepest emotions we have - it can make our initial highlight even more effective if people have high expectations, which are then topped. Add cues to help your customer look forward to their experience - invitations, countdowns, signs, distant music or light



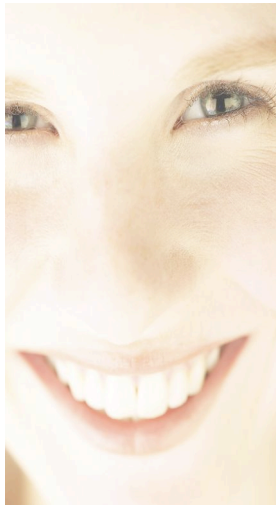
Act I, Sc. 4. Depth: finding beauty, authenticity and meaning

...touching emotion, creating memories...

A top-budget film can be full of special effects and famous stars, and be a riot to watch - but you have still forgotten all about it three days later.

Another movie might have no gimmicks at all, and be played by unknowns - and you end up remembering it all your life because it *meant* something to you.

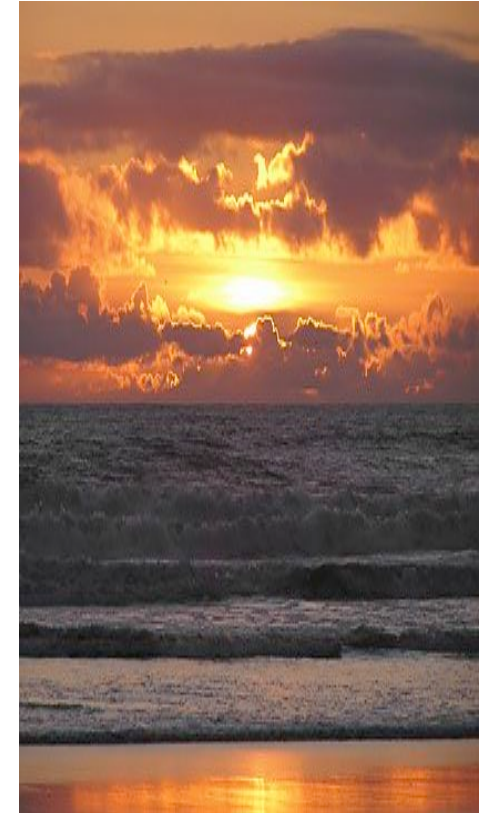
Whole books have been written on the subject of **meaning**. For now, let's just say that something has meaning for us if it *resonates with the way we understand the world* - either by confirming our existing values or by adding to them. For an experience to be truly memorable and touch emotion, it must include meaning for the people who encounter it.



Closely linked to meaning are the concepts of *beauty* and *authenticity*.

We feel something has **beauty** if it seems to be formed the way we want the world to be formed. Put another way, it has beauty if it resonates with our aesthetic values.

And of course, if we think a message is honest and told to us by real people - that is, *authentic* - we are far more likely to find meaning or beauty in it. **Authenticity** has a lot to do with letting your people be themselves (see "*let stars be stars*"), and with remaining true to your values. But it is also part of being open and playing fair - not hiding behind the small print. (Hey - why do you even *have* small print?)





Experience pioneers Disney famously achieve **meaning** by resonating with the love of family and wonder shared by so many people. Apple reached that goal by showing its fans - people who usually consider themselves creative sorts - how simple it can be to express their creativity using its beautiful products. In both cases, values are being closely addressed in a way that many of us feel to be authentic, because we trust the passion of both companies.

So, the meaning behind your experience design should be developed out of your customer's **values** - it should resonate with the way they see the world. If all components of the experience fit with those values, you are making meaning - and touching emotion.

If your experiential offering has meaning, authenticity and perhaps beauty, we can say it has **depth**. You can think of this as the message behind your experience, or perhaps the story your experience tells.

To be authentic, this depth should also be **grounded** in your own values, which in turn should be shared by your people. If it is not, you will not enjoy yourself very much - and neither will your customers.



ACT II: STAGING THE EXPERIENCE

Act II, Scene 1. Stage building

...using space, decoration and sound...

Your customer touchpoints - your retail location, your hotel, your website, your brochure - are your “stage sets”. Arrange them to mirror the *Boom-wowowow-BOOM!* of your storyboard as people move through the experience (or as it unfolds around them).

Your **entrance** must be noticeable and inviting - light it well so it can be seen from a distance! After that, you have two possibilities - an **imposing** entrance if you know your guests already plan to step inside before they arrive, or a **soft** one if you rely on customers “wandering” in.



Stage designers know that the formal shape of a *proscenium arch* (that's the archway over the front of a traditional stage) is a mighty psychological barrier. It separates two worlds and crossing it is a major event - in fact whole theatre philosophies have grown up around dealing with and breaking this “barrier”. If you want to clearly separate your **escapist** offering (your nightclub, spa, sports location, park, a really hot boutique) from the world outside, this might be the look to go for. Make the entrance high and overhanging and have it stand physically forward. If you can't afford a builder, you can do a lot with curtains, flags, roll-ups, flames, and that criss-cross scaffolding you see holding the lights at rock concerts.

If you are relying on people **walking into** your location (many retail stores, trade fair stands) you might need a softer entrance. People will enter your world step by step - and gently realize they are inside. Physically, you can take inspiration

from “apron” stages, which actors love because they blur the boundary between auditorium and stage, promoting direct audience contact. Your entrance should be wide, and should lean back - it should “close” over the customer’s head as late as possible. A first doorstep that extends a long way forward is very effective. Before you know it, you are standing on the first step.... Carpets deliver the same effect for less investment. Soften the imposing geometry of a proscenium-like doorway by placing plants or products in front of it. Put high ones near the door, lower ones further out. Once people are standing among your things, browsing, it is no big deal to step inside. Remember - whatever you put outside the entrance should be repeated inside. If you use a red carpet on the sidewalk, there should be another one just within.



To draw people *farther* inside, make sure your customers cannot see the whole set-up - there should be tantalizing **glimpses** of half-hidden treasures or dramatic features (Disney’s “*wienies*”). An easy way is to have a feature or path **curve** out of sight. Think how many landscape paintings stimulate our imagination with a little path going who-knows-where.



Inside, your **decoration** should suit the *mood* you want to create, and the *meaning* you are communicating. A place of discovery needs lots of corners and crannies; a place of contemplation wants clean lines. Place your “*wow*” highlights first, and remember your low-key contrast areas and oases of calm (with seats?). If you can vary heights of floor and ceiling, do it. A **multi-level** effect always makes a space more engaging. Think hard about lighting (see “Light”) and **sound**. You can do so much more than simply playing the radio or piped music. Just as light is not the same everywhere, sound can vary - music here, voices there, running water beyond. Remember always to reflect the story you want to tell.



Act II, Scene 2. Backstage and exits

...keeping secrets and making a splash...

The parts of your experience that your public can see are “onstage”; the rest is “backstage” – a very different world. Unless you deliberately decide to reveal parts of it (making it effectively onstage, see “*The making of...*”), your customers should perceive nothing of what is happening backstage. Of course, they should not be able to see beyond the wings; but neither should noise, movement, odours or especially light from backstage intrude on your **onstage** experience. Use line-of-sight, curtains and double doors to make sure of this.



It's been said that what's *backstage* is product, and what's *onstage* is service. If that's true, then what's *centre-stage* is experience...

So, remind your people that the way they *move* onto and off the “stage”, or in and out of the “limelight”, is very powerful (entrances and exits are crucial tools in theater). Not only can a powerful, confident **entrance** impress your audience, it can make you feel powerful too.

For more on entrances and exits in culinary experiences, see [here](#).

Act II, Scene 3. Let there be light

...directing attention, understanding colour...

It is hard to over-emphasise the importance of light in experience design. There is a fundamental law that our eyes are drawn to movement, and to light (unless it is too bright, which makes us look away). This law is something you can *use*.



If you are lucky enough to have **natural light** from the right direction, then use it - it's alive, and unbeatable. Often, though, artificial light is necessary.

If you want to draw your guests' attention to something, light it - but hide the light source. To draw in the crowds, light your entrance well (so they can find you), then throw light on a sequence of highlights running through the space. In between, provide oases with less light, and maybe a chair. Light "coming around the corner" always suggests interesting depths - it's a powerful old stage designer trick, used to make the stage seem bigger.

Not all light needs to be the same. The only white light in nature is starlight and moonlight, so white light always feels cold. Use it sparingly, or on objects that are very reflective like jewelry. Warm reds and oranges are relaxing, especially if they waver like a fire - that's why restaurants spend millions on **candles**. They can also stimulate and promote concentration. Strong red light is very flattering for the complexion, which is why it makes ladies look younger and prettier in "red light" areas. Blue and green light are far more difficult to use well. They seem weaker than warm **colours**, so you need more wattage for the same effect. They are not good on skin, but can be dramatic for high-contrast backgrounds, or if they shine onto glass or water. Nevertheless, blue and yellow *together* - the "green mix" - can relax us, as can the pale blue of dawn.



Act II, Scene 4. Costume

...helping customers know how to behave...

The way we dress our people, or the way we let them dress, is much more than just CI. Sure, encouraging the staff at your firm to have “the look” can give a great team spirit and reassure customers of your professionalism. But in experiences, clothing can do more than that. It can help our guests know how to **communicate** with us. A smart doorman’s cap tells a customer that they can freely request help. A doctor’s gown offers expertise, while a nurse’s uniform speaks of

competence while also promising a sympathetic ear. And a clown suit, cowboy costume or pirate’s eyepatch are an invitation to play, and even suggest which games are appropriate.

What **message** should your clothing communicate?

It’s crucial to give your people the opportunity to **customize** their outfits. Not only will they feel more valued, but your customers will see them as people doing a great job, not as exchangeable automatons.

For more on costume, and its limits, see [here](#).



ACT III: **PERFORMING** THE EXPERIENCE

Act III, Scene 1. Rehearse

...building confidence while trying all the options...

All actors rehearse. Even if we improv guys don't practice the lines and blocking for the show, we still train improvisation technique.

Whether you are a doctor or a plumber, every part of your customer contact is like performing a show – after all, you are trying to manage the perception that the customer forms of you and your offering. So **rehearse**! Rehearsal is a great time to play around with new ideas (promoting creativity and motivating your team), as well as getting those standard situations down pat. See “*get the lines right*” for more.



Like in the theater, rehearsals should progress from free-form early rehearsals through technical rehearsals up to the final on-site dress rehearsal with all the props and costumes.

A rehearsal needs a **director**, who might be your specified experience designer, or just each colleague taking turns. If you are brave, invite a star customer to do it. Want to make it more fun? Give them a chair, a megaphone and a director's hat. They will enjoy themselves no end - and you will learn invaluable lessons.



Act III, Scene 2. Get the lines right

...the power of precisely the right words...

Most workers have certain lines that they say over and over again. Classics include variations on “*Can I help you?*”, “*Next please!*” and “*That will be three-fifty.*” Considering how often these **lines** are said, we spend shamefully little time thinking about them.



Encourage your people to think carefully about their lines, and try a hundred variations of each. Yes, a *hundred*. Try different emphasis, different rhythm, and lots of different words. Is “*Can I help you?*” really the best approach? (Trust me, it ain’t). What about, “*Can I get you a coffee?*”, “*Great shoes!*” or “*That would look really classy with your hair – try this with it!*”...

Make sure that your folks are using their **own words** – what works for one team member will sound terrible from another.

Here’s a useful tool - stand up comedians tell us that **fricatives** (sounds that *hiss* like f, s, sh and x) and the harder **consonant** sounds (k, p, t etc) are the most powerful - especially at the end of a sentence. Comics add that rhyme and alliteration can help too. Incorporate those ideas in your rewrite. What works better at the juice stand: “*Next please,*” or “*Who’s next to be refreshed?*”



Act III, Scene 3. Let stars be stars

... wowing customers and motivating staff...



Every one of us is free to be the best in the world at what we do, free to be “world famous”. A waiter may be “only” a waiter, but he can wait a table like Pavarotti sings an aria, if you let him. In fact, we can all do more if we are allowed to **act the part**. Doctors often find it important to radiate confidence, even if they know that the prognosis is uncertain. Even making a difficult phone-call can be easy if we imagine ourselves as another, tougher person.

Remember: acting the part **does not mean being fake**! Even in “real” show business, the truth is all important. A good actor never cheats, never lies - in fact, good actors are lousy liars. A Sir Anthony Hopkins is no dissembler: he makes things *visible*. And Shakespeare always lets his characters tell the truth - to the audience at least. When we are “performing” an experience, we are a bit like actors on stage. Yes, we might spotlight or enlarge certain aspects of personality, reveal others, and project our voices a little. But we *must* remain ourselves. (See also “Depth: authenticity”)

Once your people have found their working “**character**”, support them and let them shine in it! To be confident, they must have clear permission to make mistakes. And even if they sometimes seem to be a tad outside your CI, allowing them to revel in their work and show their own best side is far more important than making everyone fit the mould.

If it is not working, go back to rehearsal and find a new approach to the role - or recast it.

For more on keeping your talent happy, see [here](#).



Act III, Scene 4. Timing is everything

...boosting experience to the *next* level...

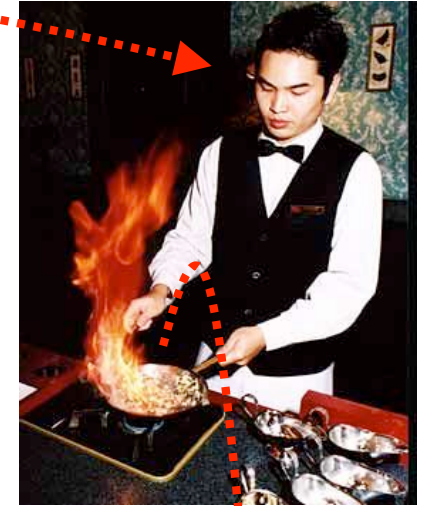
If a delivery of *building bricks* is ten minutes late, it is trivial. If a restaurant *meal* is ten minutes late, it is inconvenient or perhaps embarrassing. If an *actor* is ten minutes late coming on stage, the play will have ground to a halt, the audience will have left in disgust and his career will be history.



As you move your customer contact beyond service and towards experience, your **feeling for timing** must become more and more precise. Rather than hours and minutes, you will be working with seconds and even fragments of seconds.

This is *not* easy, and it has to be learned in practice. But timing something perfectly – making it happen precisely when it *wants* to happen – can boost your experience to the next level in your customers' perceptions. Work on timing, and talk about it. You can start by openly debating your **definition of "now"** - you will be surprised what differences you will find.

For real split-second timing, seek inspiration from the experts – Woody Allen, Laurel and Hardy, and of course Grandmasters Bugs Bunny and Wile E. Coyote MT.



COMING SOON...

If you've enjoyed this collection of show business tools for business people, you might want to look at our next e-book, out later this year:

THE EXPERIENCE DIRECTOR

Using theatrical *processes* to create your customer experience

"This step-by-step production guide will take you through the practicalities of assessing, casting, designing, scripting, rehearsing and premiering your business as a memorable and self-renewing experience for your customers - using only the resources you already have."

Release date: **End 2007**

To reserve a preview copy of *The Experience Director*, just drop us a line at

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Or, if you can't wait...

EPILOGUE: THE PITCH

You knew a pitch was inevitable, but we'll make it short and painless.

Here at Work • Play • Experience, our team of business consultants and showbiz professionals have developed a unique **process** that can turn your company into a great, memorable and self-renewing customer experience.

Importantly, our process uses **only the resources you already have**.

If you'd like to hear more, or get other tips on what a showbiz approach to experience design can do for your organisation, please contact us. We work worldwide, we work successfully, there is no obligation in a chat, and we'd enjoy talking to you!



Work • Play • Experience

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