

At First Glance

Five tips to engage your customers from the outside in.

ARUISING EAST ON PIEDMONT ROAD in Marietta, Georgia, drivers often find themselves stopped at a red light at Sandy Plains Road. From there, they can see Operator Scott Reed's Restaurant, which is known across town for its immaculate exterior and manicured landscaping. Inspired by well-groomed terrain at The Ritz-Carlton and Disney World, Reed's scenery includes a tan exterior behind a small expanse of green grass, red rose bushes, hearty sweet potato vines and elegant crape myrtle trees.



Reed's greenery offers passers-by more than just an excellent view—it offers them a spectacular first impression. "I want the exterior of the Restaurant to look excellent so that customers will drive by and say, 'Wow, anybody who's that particular on the outside has got to be particular on the inside, as well,'" Reed says.

If it looks good, so the saying goes, it must taste good, too. A restaurant's exterior is a visual welcome where first impressions can be the deciding factor to choose one restaurant over another.



Scott Reed's Store is known for its clean environment.



Go for Curb Appeal.

Beyond rousing an appetite for great-tasting food, great first impressions entice new customers and build customers' confidence in Chick-fil-A. "For most people, we're their Chick-fil-A," Reed says. "We're where they live. When they give directions to their house, they say, 'You go by the Chick-fil-A on Sandy Plains, and you turn right.' I really want to represent the community well."

To impress his customers, Reed and his team members do more than plant flowers. They sweep the parking lot, pick trash out of the bushes and collect cigarette butts from the gutters. Reed himself can even be found outside on the street, scouring the outer curb. "We can't afford a street sweeper, but we can put a pan and a broom out there," he says. "I want the outside to match the inside."

Russ Voor, a multi-Unit Operator of an FSU in Oldsmar, Florida, and a Drive-Thru Only in Clearwater, Florida, feels the same way. He strives to keep his 6-year-old Restaurant in mint condition, inside and out. "We want the Restaurant to look the same as it was the day it was built," Voor says. To maintain that unique, fresh appearance, Voor has the Restaurant exterior cleaned and landscaping groomed every weekend. He even has the building façade pressure washed so it retains its bright-white

finish. "A lot of people compliment us on how clean the Restaurant is outside," he says. "It separates us from our competitors."

Leverage the Strengths of Your Unique Environment.

Having a clean exterior is even more important at Voor's DTO. That's because he doesn't have a dining room there with which to "wow" his customers; rather he has a parking lot and an open-air patio. "Basically, a customer is driving into our dining room," Voor says. He keeps his parking lot and patio clean and garbage-free, just like he does in the dining room at his FSU. He sweeps often, wipes down the tables and umbrellas and regularly pressure washes the pavement.

If clean concrete doesn't impress drive-thru customers, however, Voor makes sure that Operational Excellence does. "Speed of service is big at the drive-thru," he says, pointing out that DTO Operators have an opportunity to impress customers behind the wheel. "If they want cream in their coffee, we do that for them because they have to keep both hands on the wheel when they're driving."

Like Voor, Mall Operator Candy Hughes of Westminster, Maryland, knows how to turn a unique environment into an

opportunity. After all, she has neither a lawn nor a parking lot with which to make a first impression on her customers. In fact, her Restaurant is not located in the food court, which many mall restaurants rely on for customer traffic. What Hughes does have, is a dining room that she's worked hard to keep in tip-top shape for hungry families. "The dining room is really cheerful," she says. "It's the first thing that people see when they walk by."

What they do see, is a dining room that's always immaculate,

Croll says. "I tell my team members, 'I don't care where you're at, if you see something on the floor, pick it up.'" Everyone is recruited into the effort to make the environment shine.

Let Cleanliness Set the Table for Service.

These Operators agree that a clean, well-tended environment is crucial when setting the table for 2nd Mile Service. Constantine Zouboukos, a multi-Unit Operator of FSUs in

“When customers first come in, they're looking at the cleanliness of the Restaurant.”

—Barbara Croll

as Hughes has her team wiping down tables every 15 minutes and cleaning the bathrooms every half hour. At least once a day, she also has team members scrubbing the dining room walls and mopping the floors.

Hughes' dining room isn't just clean. It's also clutter-free so that there's plenty of room for strollers and shopping bags to the relief of parents who often struggle to weave their way through a crowded food court. Hughes' Restaurant leaves a powerful and persuasive impression on customers who walk by it on their way to that food court—and inevitably circle back a few minutes later for a bite to eat.

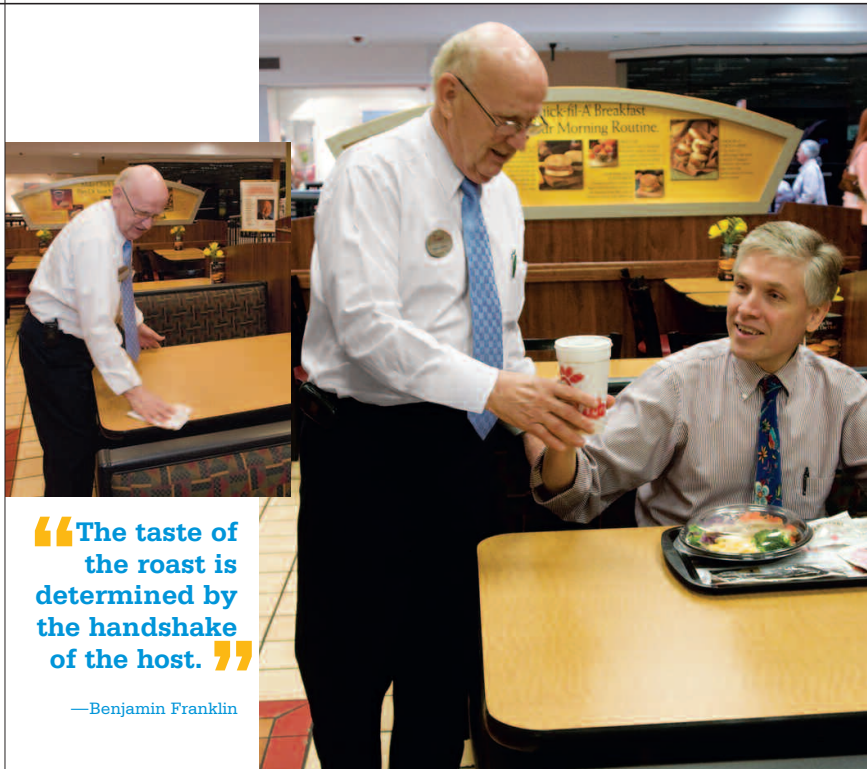
Know That Cleanliness Is Everyone's Job.

Of course, once customers are inside the Restaurant, you must continue to impress to keep them coming back. The easiest way to do that is to keep your mop and broom busy, says Barbara Croll, Operator of a Mall Unit in Wilmington, North Carolina. "When customers first come in, they're looking at the cleanliness of the Restaurant," she says.

Croll's team is focused on cleaning, scrubbing, sweeping and wiping, not only in her Restaurant, but also throughout the adjacent food court and the rest of the mall. "We're all good stewards of keeping the mall clean,"

Alabaster and Pelham, Alabama, points out that Operators have two key opportunities to make a good first impression on their customers. Although he ensures that he "wows" them with an attractive exterior and interior, he holds that an equally important place to communicate Operational Excellence at first glance is on team members' faces. In his view, a clean environment is the ultimate setting for 2nd Mile Service. "We're making real Emotional Connections with our customers," he says. "We pretty much convert customers into





“The taste of the roast is determined by the handshake of the host.”

—Benjamin Franklin

friends and family, and they're coming in almost every day because of the atmosphere."

Such loyalty grows from a positive first impression during every visit. "I don't want the first thing out of an employee's mouth to be the customer's total," Reed says. "It should be, 'Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening.' People appreciate that."

Remember the Handshake of the Host.

In a mall environment, first impressions hinge on service, as well as surroundings. That's why Hughes hired her 75-year-old father to be her dining room host. "He's super outgoing," she says. "People love him. They come in just to see him." A host or a hostess can be an invaluable member of a Mall's team because he or she is on the front line of 2nd Mile

Service, charged with giving customers an outstanding first impression with warm greetings and attentive service, Hughes explains.

"My dining room hostess is the first person that the customer sees or meets," Croll says. "She greets the customer before they even make it to the counter."

The best hosts and hostesses are people who know your Restaurant inside and out, Hughes says. They must be friendly, outgoing and personable. They provide a special energy as hosts and hostesses, and do more than say, "Welcome." They must bounce about the dining room to check on customers, answer questions about the menu, clean tables, carry trays and refresh beverages.

"You need to take your service to the customer," Croll says. "It's very important that your host knows how to do that." OE

Case Study

Leveraging the Strengths of a Unique Environment

Here's how one Operator turned a construction challenge that blocked drive-thru traffic to his Restaurant into an opportunity for increased sales.

Operator: Ken Massey

Location: South Mopac at US Hwy 290 West FSU, Austin, Texas

Challenging Environment: The temporary closing of a nearby Wal-Mart meant the possibility of less drive-thru traffic and an inconvenience to drive-thru customers that could consequently affect speed of service and sales.

Solution: Implementation of Face-to-Face Ordering to facilitate traffic flow.

Result: Earnings of between \$900 and \$1,000 in sales during peak hours using face-to-face service.



Last January, the Wal-Mart near Ken Massey's South Mopac at US Hwy 290 West FSU closed for remodeling. The retailer's automotive center located behind Massey's Restaurant also closed. The Operator from Austin, Texas, faced a potential roadblock, both operationally and logistically. "Rather than have a big parking lot where cars can make a circle around the Store, drive-thru customers were squeezed to a small, one-way street," Massey says. "Customers lost mobility around the Store."

Massey was quick to adjust to the situation and more than made up for the loss in drive-by traffic by implementing Face-to-Face Ordering. The strategy enabled team members outside to facilitate the flow of traffic for drive-thru customers, as well as relieve any congestion that might have interfered with parking for dine-in customers. "If we weren't running Face-to-Face Ordering, it would pose a significant difficulty for drive-thru customers," he says.

Customers are appreciating Massey's investment in providing increased accessibility, not to mention 2nd Mile Service, at the drive-thru. Not only does Face-to-Face Ordering give his team more time to prepare the orders because orders are taken earlier

in the queue, but it also improves accuracy. "If there's confusion and you're talking into a speaker box, it's easy not to hear the order clearly," Massey says. "Hi-C might sound like iced tea."

Face-to-Face Ordering also creates opportunities for suggestive selling. "If customers are ordering a combo, and they're not really sure what they want, team members can help them by showing them pictures on a handout menu," Massey says.

Now, Massey's Store serves up to 146 cars from noon to 1:00 p.m., averaging between \$900 and \$1,000 in sales using the face-to-face service. Once the Wal-Mart reopens as a Super Wal-Mart, his team will be prepared for the new traffic. "It's the best thing that could have happened to us," he adds.