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Enhancing your site furniture and amenities will assist you in activating public spaces - by James Shaffer

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Entertainment districts, mixed-use projects and the retail environments today are being driven by experiences. When we think of experiences, we generally think of an action or an activity. However, we'd suggest that there are many other ways to have an experience without an action or an activity. Probably one of the most overlooked opportunities for an experience relates to the furniture and site amenities already in your streetscape or located in your public space.

You can begin this process by taking a look at the demographic of your site. Who are your target customers or whom would you like to attract? Consider their interests, their challenges and how you might align with their interest. For example, many shoppers are choosing to use personal mobility rather than motorized transportation. A possible solution to attract that particular customer may involve adding bike racks to your site. Another option in this instance would be to take a double dip on the experience by adding artistic bike racks to the site so that you'll receive credit for both art and mobility.

Attracting families might involve another approach. For example, families, especially those with young children, may be especially interested in locations that are kid friendly. To attract this customer, a kid play zone might play a significant inducement. In addition, stroller parking spaces – cart corrals – near play zones might alleviate aisle congestion and improve the customer experience.

Millennials, on the other hand, are seeking places where they can meet their friends to socialize, enhance their social media network and experience life through activities. Providing an experience for this group of customers will most likely involve action, participation in an activity or a way to enhance the social experience. This customer is most likely to respond to gaming areas i.e., billiards, corn hole, ping pong, etc. Sidewalk cafés with dining and bar height tables and chairs for eating and conversation always work well along with shade in the form of umbrellas or shade sails. In relaxed spaces, low seating, sun loungers and drinking fountains for both pets and their owners add to the experiential environment.

In general to activate public spaces – the streetscape, public plazas and courtyards – think of the

street furniture and site amenities as a tool to grow your business, engage your customers and build your brand. One can have many experiences via visual, functional, social and pleasant mobility experience. Provide photo opportunities with artistic site elements.

Use bold colors in your site furniture and umbrellas to create and attract attention.

Other opportunities to activate the public space include breaking up long expanses of boring wall with artistic murals. Create quiet conversation zones in high traffic areas using planters screens and comfortable seating for those requiring a break from large crowds. Consider various types of seating to serve a variety of functions. Circular seatwalls to accommodate friends meeting friends. Traditional benches for waiting spouses. Square benches for large and small groups, eating, seating and holding shopping bags and other personal belongs.

Explore artistic, functional and new types of site furniture and amenities. In many instances, enhancing your site furniture will assist you in activating public spaces.

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