

Three Benefits of Using a Restaurant Design Build Firm

The right partner can increase speed to market, provide a strong ROI and decrease headaches.

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Opening a restaurant seems like a dream come true to many, but it is easy to underestimate the amount of work involved. Some might think that becoming part of a franchise is simple, but navigating the company requirements with the realities of the leased space can be difficult.

According to Forbes, “80 percent of the restaurant’s success is sealed before you even open the doors,” said Gary Sullivan, a restaurateur based in Boston.

A design build firm can help streamline the process and ensure success.

This white paper, sponsored by IBT Enterprises, discusses three benefits of using a design build firm when opening a restaurant, as well as how to choose the design build firm that best meets an operator’s needs.

Efficiency

Negotiating a lease, working with electricians and plumbers, getting equipment delivered, choosing furnishings and the myriad other details that go into the development of a restaurant can be time-consuming.

“Franchisees need to hire staff and coordinate construction, market the restaurant, deal with loans and order inventory, all in a tight time frame,” said Oscar Acevedo, director of outbound business development for IBT Enterprises, a design build firm



Opening a restaurant takes intense attention to detail. A design build firm can make the process smoother.

based in Norcross, Ga. “A design build firm has experience, contacts and a process in place to keep the pieces moving.”

While an operator is busy hiring staff, perfecting recipes and getting the attention of customers, a design build firm is obtaining any necessary permits, overseeing construction and ensuring the restaurant meets all codes, such as being ADA compliant.

Cost

Start-up costs vary greatly, depending on the location and franchise. A safe estimate, according to Forbes, is at least \$400,000 to purchase the franchise, lease a space, purchase equipment and hire at least a minimal staff. Those costs can quickly balloon, however.

Start-up costs

Capital outlay costs for a franchisee include:

- Purchasing the franchise
- Leasing or buying a space
- Equipment
- Staff
- Insurance
- Utilities

A design build firm has cost-savings measures in place that can help. Because the design build firm has contacts with contractors and equipment vendors, it can ensure the best price possible when taking bids. In addition, the design build firm can help a franchisee focus on essentials, keeping costs down while ensuring that all customer requirements are met. While it might be tempting to buy all bamboo flooring, for example, a design build firm can help the operator evaluate the hard benefit that flooring will bring and decide if it is worth the cost.

In addition to savings, a design build firm actually can help an operator earn more. Because the design build firm handles the general contracting, it can ensure that all deadlines are met and speed up the process of opening a restaurant. The faster a restaurant opens, of course, the sooner the operator can start taking in revenue.

Experience

Opening a restaurant can be a daunting task, especially when dealing with a franchise that has very specific requirements for how a store looks and operates. Choosing a design build firm with experience with that particular franchise can make the process run more smoothly. The design build firm

should know the prototype and be familiar with the brand standards, so it can ensure everything in the restaurant is appropriate.

“IBT knows Moe’s system, so I could leave a lot of things to them,” said Matt Rusconi, a Moe’s franchisee based in Hartford, Conn. “They knew the Moe’s standards, and so they worked with contractors to make sure the layout was correct. But they also really worked with us to find solutions to our specific needs.”

An experienced design build firm can help an operator make the most of a restaurant space. Every space, of course, has a different configuration, from a freestanding building to a kiosk in a food court. It can take a trained eye to understand how to lay out the



An experienced design build firm can help a restaurant adapt to its space, whether it is located in a freestanding building or part of a mall food court.

operation to maximize flow and keep guests comfortable, while still ensuring a safe and efficient working environment.

Choosing a firm

While using a design build firm can be a boon to operators, it's important to pick the right one. A good design team:

Listens. Each restaurant, even those that are part of a franchise, is unique. Choose a design build firm that listens to the specific needs of the customer. The design team should understand who the operator wants to serve, what type of neighborhood the restaurant is located in, what kind of price point the operator wants to hit and how the operator wants the restaurant to be perceived. Be careful, though. A true design build firm has a staff of in-house designers. This serves an operator better than a firm who farms out its design work, losing control over critical items, such as scheduling and the quality of the end design. Ask if the proposed design team are active employees of the firm — it matters more than operators think.

Has experience with restaurants. Restaurants are a unique type of establishment, with specific codes that need to be met. In particular, choose a design build firm that has experience with franchised restaurants. Navigating the relationship between franchisor and franchisee can be tricky, and using a firm who knows how to listen to both sides and find solutions that are pleasing to both is critical.

Customizes. No two projects are the same, so it's important to choose a firm that looks for solutions appropriate to that specific restaurant.

“We have restaurants in all kinds of spaces,” said Rusconi. “We have freestanding

ones and then we're opening one up on the campus of the University of Connecticut. We needed a firm that would work with the space we had, not the space they wished we had.”

Beware of a design firm that has a portfolio of the same design, as that could mean it doesn't pay enough attention to individual, site-specific needs.

Communicates. While a design build firm can and should handle all the moving pieces that go into putting together a restaurant, it's important to choose a team that keeps the operator informed. Make sure the design build firm has a system for regular status updates, and is available throughout the project. If the project manager disappears halfway through the opening, or can't be reached in an emergency, the operator could be left trying to pick up the pieces.

Opening a restaurant, even for experienced operators, is a busy, stressful time. Choosing an experienced design build firm can help make the process run smoothly, but it's important to find the right partner.

***About the sponsor:** IBT Enterprises, an IBT Holdings company, is a leading source of forward-thinking design for the financial services and specialty retail industries. During its 25-year history, the company has consulted to more than 190 retail and 550 financial services clients on the development of thousands of workspaces. IBT Enterprises offers a comprehensive range of integrated services, including retail distribution strategy, market research, space planning, design and construction, performance training and coaching. IBT Enterprises is a certified Woman Owned Business Enterprise and a member of the U.S. Green Building Council.*