

Beyond the Magic:

Disney from Behind the Scenes



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“To all of you who come to this happy place . . . welcome!”

Walter Elias Disney

Opening Day of Disneyland park

July 17, 1955



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Preface



The purpose of this thesis is to show how the Walt Disney Company preserves the magical appeal at its parks, resorts, shops and entertainment ventures through shrewd business practices, excellent planning, risky decision making, and a little bit of “pixie dust.” The thesis will explore the approaches of the original company and the post-Walt *Team Disney*, showing the different solutions found to reach the ultimate goal, the building of the “Happiest Place on Earth,” a separate fantasy world where people can leave their lives at the entrance, whether it is in an attraction, a shop, a restaurant, or a theater.

Research for this venture is a result of the study of many books about the various eras of the Walt Disney Company and research conducted while attending over forty hours of Disney management seminars and training during five months of work experience at the Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Florida while participating in the Walt Disney World College Program during the Fall semester of 1992.



Introduction



Imagine, if you will, a fantasy world. A site brimming with perfect gardens, immaculately kept buildings and shops, and crystal clear waterways. A place where the inhabitants are the stuff of fairy tales, bigger than life but cuddly enough to be nonthreatening to the smallest youngster.

This is a world of fantasy. A site that is spotlessly clean and unbelievably safe. A place where the shops and attractions are staffed by bright, handsome, helpful, and extremely polite persons of all sexes, ages, races, and religions.

This is the world of Disney. A location visited by more people per year than the Eiffel Tower, the pyramids, the ruins of Greece, or the Grand Canyon. Originally masterminded by Walt Disney, and carefully sustained by his predecessors, the “atmospheric parks” (Schickel 22) are the centerpieces of the immense Disney empire. Being the top vacation destination in the world and the largest financial contributor to the Walt Disney Company, the dreamlike world built within these parks plays a vital role in developing the image of the company.

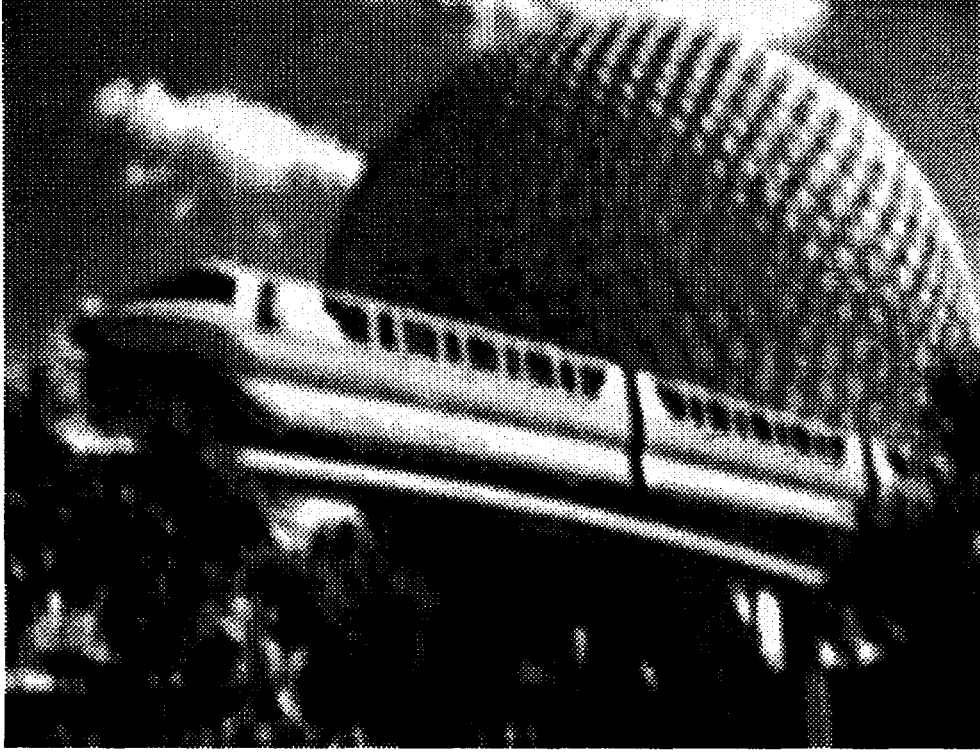


Aubrey Menen stated that “the strongest desire an artist knows is to create a world of his own where everything is just as he imagines it” (Schickel 23). Disney wanted to create a world for families to take their children, different from the “dirty, phoney places, run by tough looking people” (Schickel 310) that he took his daughters to in their youth. From this vision, an enterprise built on illusion was created, relying on people’s desires to leave the rigors of their everyday lives behind.

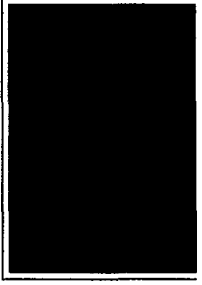
In the 1950’s, Walt’s thoughts drifted from the successful animation and film studios towards this lingering dream of a totally new form of entertainment. Deemed by Roy Disney as another one of his brother’s “screwy ideas” (Schickel 310), Walt envisioned a neat and clean fantasy park that was a cross between a regular park, with trees, gardens, benches, and fountains; and an amusement park, consisting of attractions, settings, and shops built around the stories made popular by the popular Disney films. Soon, the vision would become a reality.

The success of Anaheim’s Disneyland, Orlando’s Walt Disney World Resort, Tokyo’s Disneyland, and France’s EuroDisney is a testament to the vision and imagination of Disney and his cast of Imagineers. Without the right mix of location, planning, theming, business strategy, training, and maintenance, the projects might have fallen as flat as many critics had predicted.





Part 1: Setting the Stage



Location



A vital consideration for Walt and the Imagineers was the location of the parks. With each development, many factors had to be considered to allow for successful completion and execution of the project.

The first major consideration was getting a large enough block of land to accommodate the plans that Disney had laid out for his playground. When developing Disneyland, Disney hired the Stanford Research Institute to scout for locations in the Los Angeles area. They settled on the largely undeveloped orange groves outside Anaheim. Since Anaheim was a small farming community, the prospectus showed a large enough plot of land to allow Disney to build his initial design and purchase additional land when he decided to expand.

What the researchers didn't account for, though, was the immense popularity of Disneyland. As Richard Schickel states:



In ten years a quarter of the nation's population had made its way to Disneyland, and the number of hotel rooms in Anaheim rose from one hundred to forty-three hundred; some 250 new businesses located in the area . . . Of the riches that poured in, \$273 million went to Disneyland, but another \$555 was spent just outside the gates. . . (Schickel 358)

The Anaheim area had become an \$800 million dollar tourist mecca, and Disney was trapped in his initial 185 acres. The influx of commercial properties surrounding the Magic Kingdom weakens the illusion, letting guests catch glimpses of their normal lives while the cast is trying to build the illusion of the fantasy world.

In planning Walt Disney World, The Walt Disney Studios made sure not to make the same mistake twice. The company acquired 27,500 acres in the Orlando, Florida area. With this purchase, the company had more than enough land to develop all of the projects they had in mind. Also, the external undeveloped portions of the land served as a buffer, sheltering the guests from the real world and further enhancing the fantasy.

Another consideration for the developers was the price of the land. Profitability and investor interest relied on low cost land purchases. The acreage in California consisted of undeveloped orange groves and went for a very low cost. With no history of success, Disney easily convinced people to sell their land for his project.

With the success of Disneyland, though, the land in Florida could not be bought easily by the Walt Disney Studios. The high profitability of Disneyland assured the company of getting overinflated quotes when trying to purchase the land. Thus, the



company formed several small firms to make secret purchases of the cheap Florida swamp land. By the time it was discovered that Disney was purchasing the land, most of the purchases had already been made at a low cost.

Weather was another important factor in decisions on location. To make the parks more accommodating to guests' vacation schedules, the parks needed to stay open year-round, and thus the winter temperatures needed to be warm enough to allow the park to keep its gates open through the winter season. The sites in California and Florida were perfectly suited for winter tourism, with daytime temperatures generally above 60°F during the coldest months. Thus, the illusion would not be spoiled by inclement weather on a regular basis.

Stanford's research team and Disney's planners also considered access when choosing a site. The property selected in Orange County, California was a good fit for Disneyland. The half-completed Santa Ana Freeway passed along the border of the land. The freeway, when completed, would allow twenty-seven minute access from the Los Angeles area, close enough for convenience, but far enough away to avoid the Los Angeles smog.

In Orlando, the situation was even better for Disney. The property purchased by the company was at the intersection of I-4, SR27 and SR192, and a short distance from the Florida Turnpike, the BeeLine Freeway, I-75 and I-95. The convenience of this and the California site makes it easy for guests to reach the parks in the morning, allowing them to start their visit with a positive outlook.

Finally, in order to keep the costs low enough for guests to enjoy their stay without going broke, a location had to be chosen that would provide affordable utilities, services, and tax rates. Instead of negotiating with Osceola and Orange county in

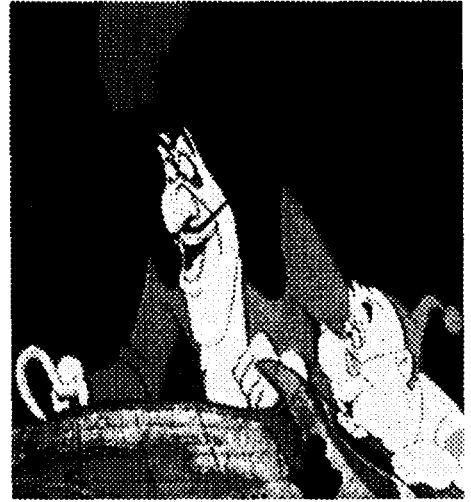


Florida, Disney decided to apply for improvement district status with the state of Florida. In a sense, they created their own county, the *Reedy Creek Improvement District*, allowing them to form their own government, utilities, law and fire departments, and local tax rates.

With the consideration of size, price, weather, access, and costs, Walt Disney Productions was able to purchase and develop properties to hold Walt Disney's fantasy world. The location of the properties serve as an important factor in the success of the parks. With all of these factors are figured in, the groundwork was laid for the creation and development of the Disney theme parks.



Planning



To effectively set a stage as large and complex as the Disney theme parks, the Imagineers had to develop new and innovative sets and attractions that were unlike any that existed in traditional amusement parks. Everything from the rides, attractions and shops themselves to the areas leading up to them had to be planned so to keep guest interest at a high throughout the course of their visit.

Rides and Attractions

When designing the attractions, Walt and his successors drew upon their vast experience in the film studio. Disney knew that the key to a good attraction, as with a good film, was the telling of a good story. Thus, the attractions at the Disney parks were never generic thrill rides, but rather stories that the guests could take part in. Building upon the fantasy housed in the vast Disney library, as well as movie rights purchased from other studios, the designers developed concepts for attractions based



on the characters and events the guests were already familiar with. The Imagineers based attractions on animated fare, such as Snow White, Pinochio, Song of the South, and The Little Mermaid, as well as live action films, such as 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, Swiss Family Robinson, Star Wars, and Honey, I Shrunk the Kids.

The Imagineers also knew that in filmmaking, camera angle and perspective are as essential to good storytelling as the good story. Using this knowledge, they developed the attractions as though they were films, using the guest's eyes as their camera.

The designers noted that a motion picture guides the viewer through time by means of “a carefully structured sequence of visual devices - the camera following the action and the audience travelling with the camera” (Finch *The Art...* 433). In the case of the attraction, the ride's car replaces the film's camera.

The cars are designed to emulate a movie camera. The guests can only see what is directly in front of the car. Much like a movie, the guest only sees and hears what the “director” wishes them to, since the car automatically turns to the scene that is the focus of the given time of the story. Thus the designers can focus the audience on the theme of the attraction, hiding the real world necessities hidden behind the set.



Queues

Along with the presence of a theme park with many rides is the presence of many lines and a great deal of waiting. In order to successfully orchestrate the theme of the park and keep the guests in the fantasy mode, Disney implements a queue management theory for the lines leading to the rides, attractions, and shows in the theme parks.

The first priority of queue management is to make sure that the guests are entertained during these periods of waiting. Disney has always implemented many forms of queue entertainment, as illustrated by the music and commentary at the Jungle Cruise and 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, the preshow movies at EPCOT Center, the atmospheric entrance of the Pirates of the Caribbean, and the cast members who entertain and serve as greeters at nearly every Disney attraction.

In the newer, more modern attractions, this queue entertainment has been perfected, as evidenced by the movie lead-ins by the likes of David Letterman, Goldie Hawn, and Tom Selleck and the beautifully detailed Ewok Village set leading into Star Tours at the Disney-MGM Studios. This distraction during a sometimes long and tedious wait helps to keep guests thoughts from drifting from the fantasy to the normal world.

The length of the queue is also of utmost importance and is continuously monitored and controlled. Since long lines can cause guests to lose focus of the theme, leaving them sometimes bored or aggravated, the lines are kept from getting too long.

Conversely, the queues are also kept from getting too short. The time spent in the queues is important to the success of the attraction and the park as a whole. By standing in line, guests are given a chance to rest and collect their thoughts about their experience in the park, reinforcing the positive memories of the past attractions. This time also serves as a time to build anticipation for the upcoming attraction or show.

Keeping the queues from being too short also serves another important function: it keeps the guests in the park longer. With no queue lines, all of the attractions at the Magic Kingdom could be experienced in half of a day. Since people are spending a good amount of money to be in the park, they would feel cheated if their experience was completed in such a short time. Approaching the park at this pace, the guests would miss out on much of the detail in the theming and would easily become tired. All of these factors would distract from the fantasy, leaving guests with a less than positive outlook of the days events.

Monitoring and controlling of the queues is handled by a few simple procedures. First, "queue cards" are periodically given to guests as they enter a queue, showing the current time when the guest entered the line. The guest is then asked to give the card to the cast member who is loading guests into the attraction, giving them an idea of how long the line is at the current time. By occasionally monitoring queue length with these cards, the cast can attempt to keep the queue at the target length, usually around 10 minutes for a smaller attraction and 20 minutes for a more popular attraction.

The cast can control the speed of the queue in various ways depending on the attraction. For example, any of the rides using cars or boats as the means of transportation can be sped up by simply adding more cars or boats to those in use in the attrac-



tion. Rides such as Big Thunder Mountain and The Haunted Mansion can open up a second “stage,” consisting of a second track for the rollercoaster or a second stretch room for the mansion.

On busy days, though, it is nearly impossible to keep the lines to the target lengths. In these cases, the queue areas are broken up into many shorter lines by ropes and railings. This strategy gives the lines the appearance of being shorter and keeps the lines constantly moving, allowing guests to feel as though they are approaching the end, as opposed to a long, straight line, as implemented in many other amusement parks.

Shops

The design and layout of the theme park’s merchandise shops also are planned to serve a number of purposes, both in terms of fantasy and economics. The scale, merchandise selection, scenery, and location all are motivated by the plan to better provide a quality guest experience.

When entering a Disney shop, it is immediately apparent that the store is scaled to appeal to the smallest of Disney’s guests, and principal recipients of purchases: the children. Disney believed that the shops would appeal more to the children if the presentation was on their scale. Thus, all shelves are low enough so that the children can grab, touch, and examine the merchandise marketed towards them. Also, there is usually a display of plush characters that the children can sit and play in. Besides the obvious appeal to the children, the planners knew that most parents will not turn down a young child who has grabbed onto a cuddly stuffed animal, leading to better sales and more profit for the shop.

The merchandise is carefully selected so as to fit the fantasy created by the attractions surrounding the shop. For instance, the shops in Caribbean Plaza in the Magic Kingdom sell merchandise related to pirates, while the Chinese Pavilion in Epcot Center sells China related toys, clothes and paraphernalia. Besides the standard Disney plush dolls and t-shirts, the items sold in the shop are directly related to the theme of its surroundings, further building the magic of the park and preventing reality from creeping in.

Many of the shops contain entertaining and unique scenery that keeps in tune with the merchandise and attractions in the area. For example, outside of Star Tours in the Studios stands a life-size, breathing replica of Darth Vader from the Star Wars trilogy. Also, Chewbacca, R2D2, C3PO, and other Star Wars characters occasionally make appearances in the shop and its surroundings.

The placement of these shops also builds on the theme and provides distractions from long waits before, and rest periods after, riding attractions. Most of the shops are strategically placed at entrances and exits of the attractions they are related to. Shops in and around Star Tours, Indiana Jones, Little Mermaid, Animation Studio Tour, Pirates of the Caribbean, and The Living Seas are perfect examples.

The combination of ride, queue, and shop strategies are the most successful, and most often duplicated, features of the various Disney parks. These methods provide the perfect integration of the fantastic images built by its surroundings, while still being functional to the flow of the park and the economic well being of the Walt Disney Company.

Theming



In the Disney amusement parks, the look and feel of the settings and surroundings play an important role in the fantasy that Walt was trying to convey. The layout, architecture, and image conveyed in the various portions of the vacation resorts are carefully orchestrated to blend and flow in a natural way, making the illusion a little more of a reality.

Layout

The various parks are laid out in such a way to maintain theme while still providing accessibility and convenience for the guests during their visit. By means of transportation methods, sequencing, and buffering, the developers were able to maintain the varying themes that are present throughout the vacation resort.



The many forms of transportation present at the Disney parks serve a twofold purpose: the mass movement of large numbers of guests and the establishment of theme. Upon entering the Magic Kingdom, guests are immediately engulfed in the theme of the park. The opening choice of transportation mode ranges from nostalgia to space. By choosing either mode, the guest is immediately removed from any normal transportation method and is quickly immersed in the rich theming that exists in the entire park on routes that are designed to not just pass from point A to point B, but rather to give the guest many visual treats.

By choosing the nostalgia route, the guest experiences an old-style paddleboat ride across the Seven Seas Lagoon to the entrance gates. This provides a perfect introduction to the sights and sounds that will be seen immediately upon entry onto Main Street USA, with its old-style shops, restaurants, automobiles, and locomotives. The use of the paddleboat is intended to stir memories in the older guests and stimulate interest in the Main Street era in the younger guests.

The alternate method of transportation is by the Walt Disney World Monorail System. This path takes the guest on a futuristic electric bus ride through the modern looking Contemporary Resort and past Space Mountain enroute to the turnstiles. The monorail ride is intended to build interest in the Tomorrowland portion of the park by stimulating thoughts of the future technology.

The walking paths inside the parks are also designed with specific purposes in mind. The layout of the parks allows the guest a freedom of choice, but still establishes controlled routes that construct a sequence from theme to theme. As John Hench of WED states:

If you look carefully at Main Street, and at all the rest of the Magic Kingdom, you will find that the visitor is taken, step by step, through a sequence of related experiences. We never jar them - we just lead them along, making the trip as interesting as we know how. (Finch *The Art...* 433)

The designers used buffers to shield the different areas of the park from each other, as well as the fantasy world from the outside world. Various gardens and walkways are used to buffer the changing themes from each other in the interiors of the park. On the outside, the developers made sure to leave miles of undeveloped forest land along the exteriors of the Disney parks, shielding the fantasy world from the realities outside and vice-versa.

Architecture

The designers and architects in charge of developing Disney properties have a great deal to do with the success of the perception of fantasy prevalent in the amusement parks and other company ventures. The design, scale, and materials used contribute heavily to the look and feel of the park, adding style and flavor to the property and building the fantasy world that Walt had in mind.

The design of the park builds the theme of the parks and provides a setting that makes the guests feel comfortable and at ease. Every piece of the set is directly themed to the land with exquisite detail, from the largest building down to the smallest sign. Even the trash cans are themed, with paint and design directly related to the area it is located.



The architects designed the park to be easy to traverse without the need for extensive use of maps. In what is referred to by Architectural Digest as “an object lesson in pedestrianism” (Finch *The Art...* 433), all of the parks are circular in layout so that the guests will eventually end up back at their starting point. Also, the parks are filled with large landmarks with which the guests can mark their location and find their way back to different parts of the property. The castles, Splash Mountain, and the Swiss Family Tree House in the Magic Kingdoms, Spaceship Earth in EPCOT Center, and the Chinese Theater and the Crossroads in the Studios serve this purpose in the various parks.

Besides being placed for the ease of navigation, these landmarks serve an important function in the building of the theme of the park. The landmarks are placed as “visual magnets” (*Walt Disney World College... Theme Park 4*), leading the guests towards different lands in the park. The long view leading towards the landmark is in filmmaking terms a wide shot, allowing guests to take in the land as a whole and see all the attractions it has to offer. As the guest proceeds towards the “magnet,” the view turns into a medium shot, showing the guest a better view of the attractions and theme. When the shot becomes a close-up, the guest can see the amazing details and proceed to the attractions and shops purposely located in and around the landmark.

The size and scale of the buildings, parks, and roadways in the set is also a major factor in creating the fantasy of the theme parks. The buildings are set at 7/8 scale of the real world, with the parks and roadways set even smaller. This creates an intimacy in the fantasy world, different from the overgrown buildings and vast open spaces of the real world. Levels above the pedestrian level are set at an even smaller scale, creating a forced perspective illusion of greater height.

The designers also used great care in selecting the materials used to build the buildings and landscapes in the Disney parks. In order to convince the patrons that the illusion is real, the sets need to be created of natural substances. But in order to be economically feasible, the majority of the park is created out of fiberglass. The solution to the problem of creating a natural look and feel was to use the natural substances at the pedestrian level, while using cheaper synthetic substances out of the guest's reach. The perfect example is the various shops in the German Pavilion of EPCOT Center, which emulates traditional German wood architecture, using real wood only up to about eight feet, where the economical fiberglass unnoticeably takes over.

Image

When emulating the vision of the future in Tomorrowland, the nostalgia of Main Street USA, or the exotic feel of Adventureland, the people and their props play a crucial role. Even with the perfect architecture, planning, and theming, an inappropriate look and incorrect staffing can destroy the illusion and undermine the theme of the fantasy world, creating a less than positive guest experience.

The Walt Disney World resort in Florida has the largest costume collection in the world. Each costume is designed to be functional for the job while fitting the theme of the area where assigned. Each area's costumes are allowed on stage only in the assigned area, with all travel outside of the area done using the downstairs service tunnels. This prevents the weakening of the fantastic illusion by, for example, seeing a futuristically clad Space Mountain cast member in the 1900's era themed Main Street USA.

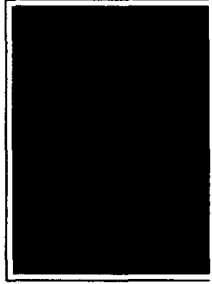
The look of the cast members is also closely monitored. To make sure each employee understands the dress codes enforced for on-stage cast, a 34 page “Disney Look” manual is distributed to every cast member. This manual details the restrictions that are in place while on stage, including the requirements related to makeup, perfume, hairstyle, jewelry, shoes, facial hair, tattoos, and costume presentation.

Because even a miscast employee can weaken the illusion, the casting department strives to correctly cast parts on-stage to further build and maintain the image of the fantasy world. In order to create the illusion that the guests are in a foreign country, the staffing personnel recruit internationals to work in the respective World Showcase pavilions in EPCOT Center. Also, cast members with visible scars or tattoos are placed in offstage positions so that the guests focus on the theme and surroundings and not on the specific cast members.

The Walt Disney Company has perfected the integration of layout, architecture, and image in creating a positive guest experience. With incredible attention to detail and many years of experience, Disney had mastered a formula that has proven to be successful time and time again. While many competing parks have copied portions of the Disney solution, none have successfully mastered the combination better than the implementation at the Disney properties.



Part 2: On with the Show



Team Disney



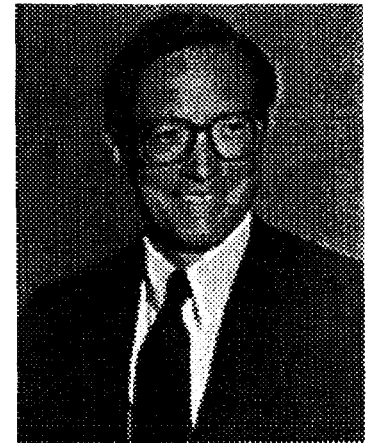
Before 1984, the Walt Disney Company had prospered for many years without a primary focus or business strategy. The company was basically a creative partnership headed by the imaginative “Uncle Walt” and his more practical brother Roy. With the firm guidance of these able businessmen, the *Walt Disney Studios* and *Walt Disney Attractions* continued to “give the public what it wants” (*Walt Disney World College... Management 2*), a quality product that relieves them of their normal lives for a short amount of time. As Walt stated:

Well, I think by this time my staff, my young group of executives are convinced that Walt is right - that quality will win out. And so, I think they're going to stay with that policy because it's proven that it's a good business policy. Give the people everything you can give them, keep the place as clean as you can keep it, keep it friendly . . . you know . . . make it a real fun place to be. I think they'll hang on as you say . . . well . . . after Disney. (*Walt Disney World College... Management 1*)

After the deaths of Walt and Roy, though, the successors to the Disney empire slipped too much into the “what would Walt have done” philosophy and lost sight of the basic element of the Disney magic: the “pixie dust.” The goals of the company became blurred during the 20 years after the changing of the guard at *Walt Disney Productions*. The magic seemed to be gone from the Disney product, with the new efforts essentially lower quality rehashes of successful formulas from the Walt era.



In 1984, after a near takeover due to this lack of direction, a new core of executives was installed, headed by Chief Executive Officer Michael Eisner and Chief Operating Officer Frank Wells. With the establishment of the new *Team Disney* management group, specific goals



and direction were laid out for the company to expand into the following decade.

The Walt Disney Company is now separated into many different divisions, but the goals remain the same. From a business standpoint, the corporate goals are

- To sustain Disney as the World’s finest entertainment company
- To maximize stockholder wealth
- To maintain and build the integrity of the Disney name and consumer franchise
- To preserve basic Disney values

(Walt Disney World College... Theme Park 4)

On the more hands-on level, though, the goals are less monetarily based and more suited to the betterment of the show. The official credo, as taught in Disney training classes, is to exceed guest expectations through quality guest experiences. In order to achieve these goals, the company would have to better define its business units and make sure that they communicate and benefit from each others actions. This is achieved by what is referred to in Disney circles as *The Seven Pillars*, the business practice of synergy, and a concept of communication.

The Seven Pillars

The Walt Disney Company was reorganized in order to specialize the company's product and provide the Disney quality that people had known and come to expect. By specializing the divisions of the company, Disney is able to focus on creating goods and services that promote the fantasy and maintain the trust that Walt Disney was famous for.

The segment of the company that is responsible for the theme parks is *Walt Disney Attractions*. This division, headed by Dick Nunis, handles the day-to-day operations of all of the vacation destinations, including Disneyland and the Walt Disney World Resort. This division is on the front line of bringing the Disney magic to vacationers worldwide.



The Walt Disney Studios includes *Touchstone Pictures* and *Walt Disney Productions*. This segment produces animation for features and television, as well as live-action movies, television shows, and home video releases. By bringing the Disney product to the local theatre and video store, the image of the company is promoted and Disney is always on the mind of the prospective vacationer.

The *Consumer Products* segment handles the Disney merchandise sold throughout the world. Under this branch of the company lies the *Disney Stores*, *Walt Disney Records*, and merchandise licensing. The *Disney Stores* are themed to emulate the magic of the theme parks. By aggressively marketing the Disney product, guests can relive the fantasy that they have experienced in their trips to Florida or California at home and in their local mall.

Hollywood Records is the newest division of the Disney team. New music acts, such as *The Party* and *MMC (The Mickey Mouse Club)* record under this wing of the company.

The creative division of the company is *Walt Disney Imagineering*. These cast members design, develop, and implement the rides, attractions, and theme of the Disney properties. Within this segment, the fantasy and aura surrounding the Disney product is created and maintained.

The *Disney Development Company* is the segment where the fantasy leaves the paper and becomes a reality. This division handles the creation of new resorts and shops, as well as improvements to the existing properties. Their developments help to maintain the fantastic aura surrounding the Walt Disney Company properties.

Finally, *Corporate Administration* ties all of the other business segments under one umbrella. By overseeing and approving the actions of the six business units, Eisner and his staff are able to ensure that the actions of these divisions are appropriate to the theme of the show.

With this breakdown of the corporate structure, the Walt Disney Company is able to function as a overseeing parent to the more diversified and specialized child business segments. This ensures that the decisions are being made by the people trained in the particular field, while still allowing the company to establish and maintain standards for all output from these units.

Synergy

Synergy - Effort used to maximize business relationships through an alliance in the company's business units. (Walt Disney World College... Management 4)

In order to tie together a company as diverse and segmented as this, Eisner and company utilized the concept of synergy. Projects developed by the company would have to evolve in such a way to involve all aspects of the company. In a circular fashion, all departments would benefit from increased profits and increased exposure, and the company would prosper as a whole.

For instance, when developing animated features, many factors come into play besides simply developing a movie. The design of the characters must be appealing enough so that people will want to see walking characters and rides in the theme parks, as well as buy toys and other sellables on the merchandise counters. Music must be

composed that is catchy enough to sell tapes, CDs, and music videos in the record stores. The story needs to be interesting enough to sell books in the bookstores, and later propel rentals and purchases of videocassettes at the video stores. By developing all of these facets, the movie and its characters gain instant recognition, leading to increased sales at the box office.

The establishment of this synergetic philosophy is seen by some as “selling out,” watering down the charm and innocence of the Disney product for profit, but in reality, this approach forces the Disney product to be of better quality. “We can’t go on television and look like trash” (Flower 220), states Michael Eisner. Thus, the synergetic business practices of the Walt Disney Company have maximized the profits and exposure of the Walt Disney trademark, while still encouraging the magical aura that has for so many years surrounded the company’s work.

Communication

The concept of communication is multifaceted in the eyes of the Walt Disney Company. Since 1984, the approach to communicating to the guests and cast has become better defined and much more aggressive.

A surprisingly new form of communication for the company is in the realm of advertising. Before 1984, the company relied on word-of-mouth advertising and the various incarnations of the Disney television show. With the advent of competition in a previously monopolistic area, the company found that they would have to revamp their

strategy. With the aggressive advertising of the Universal, Busch, and Paramount parks, *Team Disney* found that they would have to target their markets through advertising through television, radio, and print; developing promotions with various companies and groups around the country; and promoting various community relations projects, including United Way campaigns, Disney Volun-“ears,” and teacher and student award ceremonies.

Quality guest communication has always been present in the Disney parks. Every part of the guest’s visit to the theme parks is a communication in some form. The detail of the design of the various lands, attractions, and scenery is a communication of quality and fantasy. Contact with the cast communicates competence and friendliness. Availability of information booths, park guidebooks, and other forms of information communicates a willingness to be of service. Also, the cleanliness of the park communicates concern for the guest’s safety and enjoyment of the theme.

With a company as large as the Walt Disney Company, cast communication is also a necessity. In an often changing environment, it is important that the cast is current with the correct information concerning areas such as park operations, future projects and developments, and various corporate decisions. The cast communication is achieved through various print and spoken forms, including the Eyes and Ears weekly cast newspaper, the various location specific weekly newsletters, and word-of-mouth through the location management.

With a company as large and as diverse as the Walt Disney Company, maintaining a consistent business strategy that promotes quality and adherence to the theme of fantasy is a daunting, but especially important, task. With the evolution of Team Disney, the subdivision of the company into the various Pillars, the synergistic relationship between the business segments, and the communication to the guests and cast, the

company has successfully adapted into a modern corporate giant, while still maintaining the charm and innocence that surrounded the initial partnership between the Disney brothers.

Training



The Walt Disney Company puts a great deal of importance in its training methods. In order to maintain a high level of quality and theme on stage, Disney implements many different methods of voluntary and mandatory training sessions. With constant retraining of the cast, the company can insure a consistent product on stage, while further instilling the importance of the fantasy to the guest experience.

To accommodate cast training, Disney established the *Disney University*. This university handles many facets of education, including cast development, motivation and morale, communications, and guest education.

Every beginning cast member is required to attend three days of *Traditions* training, a part of the *Cast Training and Development*. During the first of these training sessions, the history of the company is relayed. The rest of the training sessions stress the importance of promoting safety, courtesy, showmanship, and efficiency, and detail specific details related to the position the cast member will be filling.

After *Traditions*, the cast member spends a number of days training at the job site. Depending on the position, this training may last anywhere from a couple days to over a week. For example, a position with a long speil, such as the Great Movie Ride, will require a longer training period due to the complexity and diversity of the position, whereas a custodial position may require only a few days to educate the cast member of requirements and responsibilities.

Cast Training and Development also teaches cross-company skills, allowing cast members to develop skills that will allow them to advance to other areas of the company. These classes include clerical, finance, and business courses offered by Disney trainers or local college instructors.

The *Program Development and Quality Assurance* group serves as the consultants to Disney trainers, seeking to improve the quality of the training sessions offered through *Disney University*. This department develops all cast and guest training sessions, helping to educate the masses about the Disney magic.

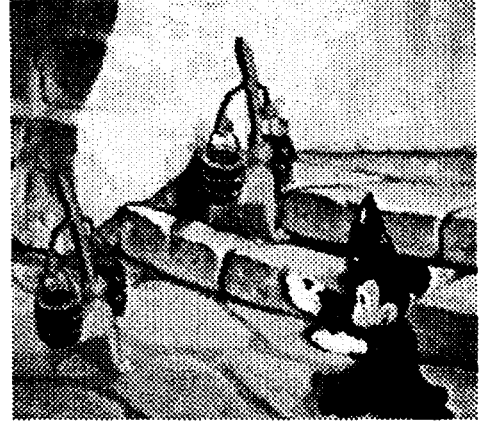
Cast Activities promotes the morale and helps to motivate the cast members to approach their positions enthusiastically. This department organizes recreational seminars and activities, as well as service awards and community service.

Finally, *Seminar Productions* organizes and teaches seminars for guests. These programs allow students, educators, and professionals the opportunity to get an inside glimpse at how the Disney magic is developed and promoted.

The various *Disney University* training methods strive to take an active part in serving and developing the cast. The goals of these training methods form the backbone of the Disney Success Formula. The Success Formula states that a successful

future relies on three important factors: quality cast experience, quality guest experience, and quality business practices. The training programs help to integrate these factors into the cast member's daily operation, and thus promote the image of fantasy while they are on stage.

Maintenance



Because a dirty and broken down stage can detract from the show, maintaining the park is a top priority for the Walt Disney Company. Walt knew the importance of cleanliness to his illusion, and thus trained a large staff of custodial cast and built Disneyland far enough from Los Angeles to avoid the smog from the urban industrial zones. With the efforts of the Maintenance, Custodial, and Horticulture departments, as well as support from all of the other departments in the parks, the stage is kept in top condition, further building the image of the fantasy world.

The Custodial Department provides the most visible support for the large maintenance staff. This group provides the cleaning service that keeps the streets, shops, restaurants, and restrooms tidy during times where up to 120,000 guests are enjoying the park.

A typical day for the daytime custodians starts at least two hours before the park opens. At this time, one or two cast members in each land work to prepare the park for the day's first guests. First, the streets are swept of the water from the early morning

washing. Then, the benches, railings, and trash cans are wiped down, the ashtrays are filled with sand, the water fountains are cleaned, and any lingering trash is disposed of. Restaurant openers unstack and clean all tables and chairs, clean woodwork and brass, freshen trash cans, and pick up any lingering trash.

Because guests are more inclined to throw trash in the waste cans when the streets are clean and the trash cans are empty, the custodial cast concentrates on keeping the streets and restaurants clean and the trash cans empty during operating hours. Along with street sweeping, the cast does frequent trash runs, consisting of emptying the trash into the AVAC waste disposal system and cleaning the trash cans and lids. On most days in any given land, a new trash run must begin when the previous one ends due to the volume of waste.

During parades, the custodial cast must be very active. Because of the large gathering of guests along the parade route, extra efforts must be taken to keep this area clean. The custodians use before and after parade trash runs, honeybuckets to clean up after the parade horses, and large brooms and powervacs to clean trash left after the parade has ended.

As the day winds down, the custodial cast must stay one or two hours after closing of the park. The nighttime duties include rinsing the trash can liners, sweeping all extraneous trash, and stacking restaurant chairs. Closers finish the evening by moving to Main Street to clean Town Square, and the train, monorail and ticket stations.

The night shift consists of custodial and maintenance cast. Custodial cast members have duties that include waxing floors, polishing brass fixtures, cleaning attraction cars and boats, washing dining areas, and sandblasting and rinsing the streets. The maintenance cast fixes any problems encountered during the day, including upkeep on attractions, dining areas, restrooms, and scheduled maintenance projects.

Rides and attractions are tested and fixed during this night shift, reducing downtime during show hours and thus minimizing distractions from the illusion of the show. Because of this constant maintenance, even the most complex attraction is only shut down for a short time during operating hours each year for repair.

The Horticulture Department handles the plant life in the parks. This group keeps the grounds and gardens looking sharp before and during operating hours. During the day, these cast members can be seen replacing dying plants with new ones, or planting new gardens. By night, lawns are mowed, plants are watered, and trees and shrubs are trimmed. This group is also responsible for the Tree Farm, where the spectacularly kept shrubs are groomed to look like Disney characters.

The custodial, maintenance, and horticulture cast combine to keep the parks and resorts looking wonderful, but they are not alone. Every cast member is trained to keep the parks neat and tidy by picking up any trash they encounter during their time on stage. Together, all of the cast helps to keep the illusion alive, letting guests escape to a sparkling clean fantasy world where they can leave the sometimes dirty real world behind.



Conclusion: A Personal View



During the Autumn semester of the 1992-1993 school year, I was selected to participate in the Walt Disney World College Program. During this time period, I was allowed the opportunity to experience firsthand the Disney magic and how it was developed through the concepts discussed in the pages of this text.

My work experience involved being a Custodial Host in the Magic Kingdom. In this position, I was given the opportunity to understand the importance of the maintenance efforts, training, and guest communication towards the magic of the Disney parks. I also had the opportunity to work as a Survey Host, allowing me the chance to see what the guests expect from their Disney experience, and to understand how much of the theming and detail in the parks is actually noticed by the average guest.

My living experience allowed me to meet some of the most unique people that I have met in my life. The living accommodations for the program were shared by the International Program participants, allowing me the opportunity to live with and experi-

ence the cultures of roommates from Norway, Germany, France, and Canada. Also, many of the American acquaintances made during the experience are still important parts of my life. These experiences make it easy to see how the casting builds on the fantasy world created in the parks.

As a whole, the Disney experience left me engulfed in Disney magic. The methods used to merge the location, planning, theming, training, maintenance and business practices into as profitable a venture as the Walt Disney World resort proves that their methods are valid, but more importantly, the fact that the park is the most popular vacation destination in the world proves that the magic that Walt Disney created so long ago is still alive and well with *Team Disney*.

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