



What's Your X-Factor?

The ultimate in-store service experience will make your location not just a place to buy your products, but a destination on a Friday night or any night.

There's a Cold Stone Creamery in Fremont, Calif., that has a reputation for fun, laughter, and of course, great ice cream. Nearly all Cold Stone Creameries attract a crowd, but this store seems to do more. It seems to attract... an audience.

In a shopping center that is decidedly subdued, something extraordinary takes place just about every evening at the Fremont Hub. And that something is what we call Cold Stone's "X-Factor." X-Factor is our way of describing that certain magic that separates the extraordinary from the ordinary. It's the kind of ultimate in-store service experience that makes this location not just a place to get ice cream, but a destination on a Friday night or any night. In Fremont, the X-Factor presents itself as 10 energetic teenagers -- the crew members -- who sing, dance, banter with the audience, then, toss, catch, mix and service our signature ice cream creations. The lines are out the door.

I tell you this story not so that you can start teaching your front-line crew members songs and make them dance. You may own a hair salon and that wouldn't really work. I'm sharing this because it's proven that franchisees with exceptional employee-customer interaction do better than those who are just adequate. (Translation: ho-hum.) The fact is, you can have a great product, keep a clean store, even have a great location -- but if your crew members don't leave an extraordinary impression on your customers, you'll limit your business.

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore wrote a book a few years back called *The Experience Economy*. In it they say that people don't want great products or services anymore. They want experiences and they want them not just in four-star restaurants. They want them everywhere. At the dry cleaner, at the sub shop, at the ice cream store. If this is shocking, look around your own community at the most successful businesses and see for yourself: In most cases, the ones that are winning go above and beyond to deliver their own unique X-Factor.

So the questions every franchise owner needs to ask are these:

- What is the X-Factor in my store?
- How do I train my crew to deliver it?
- What do I use to measure its success?

Many franchise concepts have great training programs, and those will help with the second question, but what if your franchise doesn't have an X-Factor and your franchisor has yet to see the power of the experience? This shouldn't be a problem. Many of the greatest ideas in franchising history came not from the franchisor, but from the franchisees. Jim Delligatti invented the Big Mac, Lou Groen came up with the Filet-O-Fish and Herb Peterson developed the Egg McMuffin. All were owner operators of McDonald's, and their ideas were pretty big hits! Dave Siemienski, a Cold Stone Creamery franchisee in Southern California, came up with Cold Stone's own unique way of holding crew "auditions." Take initiative for your own X-Factor and let your customers be your guide.

The final point is measuring success. In franchising, your daily results are business barometers. Metrics that measure the success of the in-store experience can be a range of things: sales in dollars, percentage increases, customer count, average ticket, word of mouth buzz, or customer comments. Even the intangibles are measurable by simply asking customers how they happened into your store and looking at customer comment cards. I'm a big believer in the saying "you can't manage what you don't measure." Set a baseline at the start and compare as you go.

No matter where you are in your business, it never hurts to take a look at your store from your customer's perspective. Is the experience worth coming back for? Worth telling a few friends? If not, it's up to you to find the magic that is the X-Factor, then let your crew bring it to life. The result may just be exceptional business growth.