



THINKING BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE POOL:

FIVE KEYS TO DEVELOPING RECREATIONAL WATERFRONT SETTINGS.

BY JIM DUNN

THE SUCCESSFUL RESORTS UNDERSTAND THAT THERE'S MORE TO WATER THAN JUST PUTTING IN A POOL. DISCOVER HOW THE MOST CREATIVE MINDS IN THE INDUSTRY ARE DESIGNING TO THE BRAND EXPERIENCE AND BOTTOM-LINE IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR INVESTMENT.

Incorporating new recreational water settings or enhancing current features at your resort is a substantial undertaking and investment in your property. And to get it right takes significant planning and a comprehensive understanding of everything your resort is—and wants to be. Many resorts assemble the usual team of aquatic consultants, landscape architects, and building engineers resulting in beautifully designed pools and landscaped areas.

Not bad. But could the result be better? What if the underlying reason for developing these areas—and let's face it, we wouldn't be spending

the money if we weren't planning on making it back—was incorporated into every aspect of the planning right from the start? What if each element was designed to maximize your resort's existing operations, infrastructure, and brand to achieve an overall experience that is not only pleasing to guests but also is driving ROI through incremental revenue opportunities, ADR, resort fees, and repeat visitation?

Before you put pencil to paper, consider how the development of your aquatic setting ties into these bottom-line concerns that truly help drive your business to succeed. Creating the right aquatic environment for your resort starts with a larger conversation. According to Jim Dunn, executive vice president at Aquatic Development Group, Inc., a veteran design/build company of aquatic settings, it's about *thinking beyond the edge of the pool*.

From concept to completion, it's

about addressing the guest experience, branding, operations, and processes from a holistic approach—putting the right mix of attractions, landscaping, and operational functionality together in the right way to best reach your overall business goals. "In many cases," says Dunn, "we'll often have two or three meetings before we even begin talking about the pool."

Before you begin your next venture into developing recreational water settings for your property, Dunn outlines five key factors to consider from the onset. Incorporating these factors into your planning will not only help save you time and money during development but could also pay off in back-end revenue-generating enhancements.

FACTOR #1: Designing for overall guest experience.

Recreational aquatic settings have



a major impact not just on sales and revenue but on a resort's clientele demographic. To be a successful investment, any creative water project must deliver the desired guest experience while building around the specific business goals at the core of the project. Instead of thinking "we need another pool," you should actually be asking the question "why do we want a pool and what do we want it to accomplish?" The answers to these questions may naturally lead you in a few different directions and should help to focus you on exactly what your investment in creative water is meant to accomplish.

As with any resort setting, it all begins with the guest experience. There is a big difference between the phrase "waterpark" and "luxury resort." Two ends of the spectrum evoke two very different images. Are you looking for guests to bump elbows on the way to the waterslide line? Sip cocktails in a poolside cabana? Or maybe it's a little of both. Do you want to attract more families to your property, or are you looking to increase business traveler frequency?

Incorporating the right amount of space for fun and relaxation—as well as retail, food and beverage, exit and

entry points, service accessibility, and guest flow—are all key factors that affect the overall guest experience and should inform your design from the onset. It has to do with the size and intimacy of the space you are creating, the capacity during any given time period and how much public versus private space you want guests to have.

"Whatever the specific goals, the initial conversation should never be about what size or shape the pool is," says Dunn. "Rather, start with a business plan that defines the experience you are trying to create for the guests you want to attract."

FACTOR #2: Achieving (and exceeding) brand expectations.

When planning creative water settings, you need to carefully consider three things when it comes to designing to your brand: physical appearance, attractions and amenities, and logistical operations. So much more than just adding a pool or waterslide, it's designing and building specifically to meet your guest's brand expectations in each of these areas.

Whether bright, kid-friendly colorful indoor and outdoor attractions, or a more sophisticated adult setting, the goal is to create the right blend of

design with the right mix of attractions that reflect the brand image you have so carefully developed. Consider how each attraction, amenity, and design element supports and enhances your resort's goal of creating market differentiation and how these images will convey the brand through marketing and advertising initiatives. Creating an environment that will allow for effective communication of the experience is of primary importance when it comes to attracting your desired guests.

The key part of continued success is then delivering on those expectations once the guests are on-property. Incorporating the logistical and operational workings of your resort into the design from the very beginning allows you ensure that the environment will work within your resort's infrastructure and staffing ability to deliver on those expectations. From the placement of every lounge chair, towel station, and umbrella to the location of food and beverage stations, control portals, and access paths, the entire design and function of your resort waterfront area needs to be carefully considered and planned in order to deliver upon the promised expectations.



FACTOR #3: Optimizing Operations.

When it comes to creating resort waterfront settings, thinking beyond the edge of the pool means thinking about how the delivery of guest experiences will be carried out from a logistical and operational standpoint. From general management to marketing, reservations, food & beverage, retail and staffing, the right operational functionalities must be in place in order to successfully meet the new requirements that your space will demand.

Capacity

By focusing on the overall goals and objectives for the entire aquatic space—instead of just the pool—the narrative for how you design the setting can really start to take shape. For example, consider the average size of events that take place in your market area versus your current capacity. A need for more entertainment venues can be incorporated into the initial design by getting creative with additional deck or outdoor F&B areas through multi-level structures to maximize the available space, even if the actual space is limited. Beyond just a pretty pool to stand around, incorporating capacity-maximizing factors into your design from the very

beginning can yield tremendous results in the end.

Accessibility

From access to kitchens, to service paths, to power access points, designing around these necessities makes for a more efficient and productive experience for both guests and staff—one that creates both an aesthetically pleasing environment that is both operationally and functionally sound. In terms of revenue generation, how to best utilize available space needs to be developed in conjunction with current amenities and delivery convenience. Having easy access to bars and kitchen areas, for both employees and guests can have a tremendous impact on your incremental revenue generation—shorter waits between drinks means more drinks the staff can deliver, which means more drinks purchased. Thus, the location of walkways, cabanas, lounge chairs, and tables all affect your ability to generate revenue. Ensuring available space and allowing for the proper allocation and placement of these amenities affects more than just how your guests enjoy your property, it affects your bottom line.

Guest Flow

Adding water also involves how you

service your guests around the water. Design factors that direct the flow of guests through your property such as changing landscapes, adding or removing furniture elements, and compartmentalizing decking areas may create more circulation to make it easier for people to move around and directs them past key points of revenue generating venues. Access paths that directly cross retail outlets, towel stations positioned near F&B, cabanas positioned to create appeal to an otherwise out of the way location—all of these elements should be incorporated into the initial design of your recreational water area to maximize guest flow for revenue.

FACTOR #4: Adding attractions with appeal.

Creative water is all about creating a fun and memorable experience for your guests, but it also needs to complement your brand and not overwhelm your existing architecture and infrastructure. Incorporating unique and exciting features that appeal to guests, working within the operational structure, and capturing the essence of the brand is a constant challenge. How do you push the envelope to offer guests a unique experience while



offer guests a unique experience while still maintaining the essence of your brand? Experienced designers and planners that specialize specifically in creating recreational waterfront areas for resorts are familiar with all of the latest developments and architectural treatments that creatively showcase the areas you want to highlight, camouflage those you don't, and blend them seamlessly together with subtle approaches in design. Capturing market share of your target audience means incorporating attractions that will appeal to their desires. And attracting multiple audiences, from families to business travelers to convention groups, often means combining contrasting elements into one cohesive design—hot tubs for adults, a play structure for kids, a surf simulator for teens, or large groupings of slide complexes versus spaced out rivers and pools. Determining how to showcase and blend each area into one cohesive resort property needs to be based on a combination of brand image,

operational functionality, and guest experience. Ultimately the decision to add any water setting comes down to how you want your resort to be positioned in the market and how these elements can work together to achieve the results you want. Dunn notes that when considering a design you should always consider the present opportunities but look to the future. “Do you have the right property layout and design to accommodate added features down the road? Should you consider both indoor and outdoor elements? Do you have current spaces that could be reconfigured to accommodate new plans? All of this should be on the drawing board as your creative water takes shape.”

FACTOR #5: Implementing a successful process.

With cost, construction schedules, and seasonal timing always at the forefront, it is important to work with an experienced partner that has the

expertise to tie all of these elements together from the very beginning to maximize efficiencies in development time—incorporating guest experience, branding, operations, and future expansion possibilities into every conceptual plan. If you want to achieve the most successful revenue-producing project, then all of the key elements from landscaping, architecture, aquatic design, and attractions should be considered from the onset as one holistic entity for design and developmental purposes when creating your recreational waterfront setting. Several elements should be considered at the outset—feel and capacity of the space, operations flow, revenue-generating opportunities, complimentary architecture and landscaping, etc. These five considerations can help create a focus for this conversation to see if this option is a good one for your resort.



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ADG designs and builds waterparks and recreational water and mountainside attractions for all types of venues from amusement parks and resorts to ski mountains and small aquatic settings. Our innovative InDepth™ approach focuses on our client's success by utilizing a unique revenue generating design philosophy that we apply to every project, whether for a complete waterpark design/build or single product manufacture and install. All of our products and designs, from Water Rides and FlowRiders® to Mountain Slides and Coasters, are developed to create an experience for our client's customers that encourage incidental purchases, entice repeat visits and increase length of stay.