



## 2003 thinkAbout Top Ten Experiences of the Year

### #10. The Library Hotel, New York, NY

Located at the corner of Madison Avenue & 41st Street in New York City, The Library Hotel ([www.libraryhotel.com](http://www.libraryhotel.com)) boasts of offering “a thought-provoking experience on Fashionable Madison Avenue”. It does just that, and we heartily encourage you to experience this wonderfully themed venue the next time you visit New York City.

Each of the sixty guest rooms is themed within ten guest floors corresponding to one of the major categories of the Dewey Decimal System: Social Sciences, Literature, Languages, History, Math & Science, General Knowledge, Technology, Philosophy, the Arts, and Religion. Click on “Concept” on the hotel’s web site for a complete look at the theme’s schema.

**Our Question:** What *system of theming* could you employ in your own business?

### #9. John Robert’s Hair Studio & Spa, Cleveland, OH

Founded by John Robert DiJulius III, John Robert’s Hair Studio & Spa ([www.johnrobertsspa.com](http://www.johnrobertsspa.com)) exemplifies a plethora of practices and principles worthy of study. (Jim likes to say John offers “a thousand small ideas that together roll up into one great experience”.) Every guest receives a complimentary hand and wrist massage. On-premise pagers silently inform stylists of next appointments without introducing negative cues that detract from a current appointment’s experience. A separate “guys” room (in this “gals” place) is themed with a sports motif. One-to-one marketing abounds.

Our favorite element of the experience: New customers receive white smocks, in lieu of usual black ones, to subtly point out first-time guests to workers. Oh so naturally, each worker stops to introduce themselves, creating the impression of a most friendly place!

We should point out that John has written a book, *Secret Service: Hidden Systems That Deliver Unforgettable Customer Service*, available at: [www.secretservicesystems.com/](http://www.secretservicesystems.com/)

A final note: we’re now convinced our “3S” Model (Satisfaction, Sacrifice, Surprise. . . and, surprise, a fourth “S” – Suspense!) actually has a fifth “S”, namely Secrecy. So take out your copy of [The Experience Economy](#), turn to page 100, and write in our fifth formula:

$$\begin{array}{rcccl} \text{Customer} & & \text{What customer} & & \text{What customer} \\ \text{Secrecy} & = & \text{could know} & - & \text{gets to know} \end{array}$$

There is a sixth “S”, of course, but we’re keeping it a secret!

**Our Question:** How could you *secretly signify* first-time customers for special treatment?



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## #8. Swarovski's Kristallwelten, Tyrol, Austria

Swarovski's flagship Kristallwelten experience ([www.swarovski.com/kristallwelten/main.htm](http://www.swarovski.com/kristallwelten/main.htm)), which translates as "Crystal World", is housed entirely underground. After paying an admission fee to the crystal manufacturer, guests literally walk into the side of a hill right outside its original factory. Once ensconced underground, one encounters the world's largest crystal, an entire wall of crystal, various related sensory experiences –and of course the gift shop, filled with sparkling examples of Swarovski's craft. (One nice touch: the international man and woman signs for the restroom were also made out of crystal!)

Joe visited Kristallwelten on a rainy day several years back while speaking at an event in the Alps. Only after exiting the experience, heading outside again into the pouring rain, did Joe realize he never got to experience the factory itself, just a hundred yards or so from where he stood. He asked around only to find out that Swarovski never lets any outsiders into its factory – its manufacturing process is a secret! A signature secret, it signified to us.

**Our Question:** What should be your *signature secret*?

## #7. The Medieval Times

The Medieval Times isn't a newspaper from the distant past -- it's here-and-now part of the landscape of the Experience Economy. Medieval Times caps off our "Chicken" Progression of Economic Value as a wonderful alternative to our well-known birthday-cake and coffee illustrations. Just try these four (actually five) clicks down to the chicks:

[Chicken Experience](http://www.medievaltimes.com) ([www.medievaltimes.com](http://www.medievaltimes.com))

[Chicken Service](http://www.kfc.com) ([www.kfc.com](http://www.kfc.com), [www.chickfila.com](http://www.chickfila.com))

[Chicken Goods](http://www.tyson.com/Product/ChickenProducts.aspx) ([www.tyson.com/Product/ChickenProducts.aspx](http://www.tyson.com/Product/ChickenProducts.aspx))

[Commodity Chicken](http://www.mcmurrayhatchery.com) ([www.mcmurrayhatchery.com](http://www.mcmurrayhatchery.com))

Yes, chickens can be used to demonstrate how over the past two hundred years we have shifted from an Agrarian Economy based on extracting commodities, to an Industrial Economy based on manufacturing goods, to a Service Economy based on delivering services, and now to an Experience Economy based on staging experiences.

Today, one can still buy commodity chickens from various mail-order outfits. Little chicks cost about \$1.15 a piece from McMurray Hatchery. Jim knows a family at his church that still raises such chickens (but pays an Amish family to butcher them...). But few of us buy commodity chicken. Rather, we buy it as a packaged good, processed and frozen by Tyson's, and available for \$1.99 per pound at the grocery store. Or we buy from a chicken-cooking service such as KFC or Chick-fil-A, at \$1.99 for a few pieces. For a real chicken experience, however, head to Medieval Times, located in eight tourist cities in North America, and pay \$41-48 (plus \$5 for premium seating) to watch a knight-jousting competition while consuming the chicken. This is an admission-based experience wrapped around a piece of poultry!

Consider one particular aspect of Medieval Times, for subsumed in the experience is a lower-cost service operation. How so? Well, there is no silverware, for example, as one eats with traditional medieval utensils -- your hands. Less servers-per-diner are required to slop food and pour pitchers than at a refined restaurant. While there is clearly a significant investment in the experience, the medieval theme allows this cost to be partially offset by lower service expenses.

**Our Question:** What paid-for experience could be created from *eliminating expenses*?



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## #6. AmericasArmy.com

Visit [www.AmericasArmy.com](http://www.AmericasArmy.com) and then click on the box "What is America's Army" to get a feel for what this virtual experience is about, why it's there, and how it works. If you are real PC gamer, you ought to download the simulation game and give the full experience a try.

Basically, America's Army is an innovative way for gamers to learn what the Army is all about, and see if it's something they might want to join. To play, an electronic boot camp of sorts is downloaded. Then individuals train for Green Beret status that enables each to then download a multi-user game, taking on the role of a member of a Special Forces unit with others who passed the first phase. Those that do well here are told that they could make it in the real Army! In other words, it's a virtual *marketing experience* used not to generate demand for economic offerings but for recruits!

We first learned of the offering when Joe shared the stage at the 2002 Pop!Tech conference with Army General Paul Gorman, retired, whose department came up with the idea. Gorman explained that the Army wanted to counteract all those Rambo-like shoot 'em up games out there, for that wasn't what the Army is really all about. Soldiers have to work together in teams in order to accomplish missions, not go out and shoot everything in sight. As the website says, America's Army provides an "Authentic U.S. Army experience" -- one that will hopefully transform gamers into recruits, and then begin the process of transforming recruits into soldiers, and just possibly soldiers into heroes. (See endnote 92 in *The Experience Economy* for more on the role of such simulations in this process!)

**Our Question:** What *work simulation* could you stage as an engaging recruiting experience?

As motivation for your own thinking, do play America's Army -- and if you do, please share your experience with us!

## #5. Hard Rock Vault, Orlando, FL

To begin, note the number of experiences Hard Rock offers today beyond its original industry-creating cafes: hotels, casinos, on-line auctions, and not one but two educational offerings (School of Hard Rocks, Hard Rock Academy). Several years ago, Jim did a gig with the senior management team at Hard Rock, and it's clear the company has moved aggressively in expanding its portfolio of experience offerings since then. Check out: <http://www.hardrock.com/>. Click at the left, below Cafes, onto "Hard Rock Vault" to read more.

Located on International Drive in Orlando, the Hard Rock Vault is an admission-fee experience where guests pay \$14.95/\$8.95 (adults/children) to view rock-and-roll artifacts not on display in any of the now 115 Hard Rock Cafes located throughout the world (yes, 115 cafes!). It's a new genre of Hard Rock experience, bringing incremental revenue to the very first of the theme restaurants. (Way ahead of its time, it was founded back in 1971 in London.) It's also a way for Hard Rock to defray the cost of warehousing unused artifacts in their rock-and-rock collection. For the place is *really* a storage facility, disguised as "themed galleries" in yet another Orlando attraction!

**Our question:** What storage or other *back-stage operation* could be offered as an experience?



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#### #4. Mid-Columbia Medical Center, The Dalles, OR

The catalyst for change here was none other than Mark Scott, the former CEO at Mid-Columbia and now Starizon principal who's been to our past two thinkAbouts. Twelve years ago Mark realized that things needed to change at this 49-bed regional hospital. He began working with Leland Kaiser, noted healthcare futurist, and also joined the Planetree Institute to learn more about "putting patients first." See: Planetree: Innovative Health Care Providers at <https://griffin.secsites.com/book1.htm>.

Not coincidentally, two other fellow thinkAbout alumni, Patrick Charmel and Susan Frampton, now run Planetree from Griffin Hospital in Connecticut. The link above refers to a new book they've co-edited, which we recommend for any company -- not just healthcare enterprises -- wanting to do better at caring.

Eventually, Mark took as his theme for Mid-Columbia the Planetree philosophy of "Personalize. Humanize. De-mystify." As a result, Mid-Columbia now personalizes its healthcare experience by eliminating visiting hours, letting family members stay all night if they want to, letting patients choose their own color of gown, and so forth. It humanizes its healthcare experience by providing rooms modeled after country homes -- each unique, with its own name -- as well as having kitchen/dining areas on every floor so patients and visitors can cook and dine together as a family. And it de-mystifies its healthcare experience by letting patients have access to their own medical record (they can even right progress notes on their charts for the doctors to read!), by giving them a personal packet of information regarding their illness and treatment alternatives (if they so desire), and providing a huge healthcare resource library (a Planetree hallmark) for the patients, family members, and even the community at large, to learn all there is to know about particular conditions.

That's really just a small token of what Mid-Columbia is about today. You can learn more as well (and see some pictures) at the Mid-Columbia home page at <http://www.mcmc.net/>.

So great is the experience, that scores of organizations visit the place to learn from it, an experience for which the hospital charges an admission fee, exemplifying one of our favorite principles! But that's not the principle for which we included Mid-Columbia Medical Center in our Top Ten list. Rather, it's because Mark persuaded his board to create a place within the place just for cancer patients.

On a hill above its main building, Mid-Columbia created Celilo, named after the set of falls in the Columbia River Gorge where tribes of American Indians used to gather. Commemorating that fact, outside the main entrance is a wonderfully rendered waterfall. Inside is an open atrium, often with a harpist plying her instrument. (She's a musical thanatologist, actually, but that's another story. . . .) Celilo has the very latest in high technology, but that exists only for treating the disease, not the patient. For patients, there's a full spa offering massages and whirlpools, as well as classes on how to relax, think positively, and approach healing -- all directed under the care of a personal guide. The waiting areas have chaise lounges in a garden environment, looking out on to the natural beauty of the gorge, and out front is a walking labyrinth for prayer or meditation. The whole aim is to get patients in the most relaxed mood possible before undergoing radiation or chemotherapy.

Bottom line: while the board was very skeptical that such a small hospital could make a go of a dedicated environment for cancer patients, the venue now draws from a seven-state area. Where people used to bypass Mid-Columbia and travel 90 minutes farther west to Portland, now people from Portland often come to Mid-Columbia for treatment!

**Our question:** What existing experience deserves *its own place*?



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### #3. Zorbing

Check your dictionary: zoosterol, zootomy, zoot suit, zori. . . but no "zorb" and certainly no "zorbing" -- at least not until Webster's recognizes the work of Dwane van der Sluis and Andrew Akers, who together invented the zorb as a prop for zorbing! That is, they created a ball big enough to put a person inside, and then roll it down a hill!! For background, photos, and video footage of zorbing visit:

<http://www.zorb.com/>

Zorbing was named by National Geographic Traveler as one of 120 recommended "Experiences of a Lifetime" in its October 2003 issue -- just one month after we placed the experience at #3 in our 2003 Top Ten countdown! (Jim came across zorbing a few years ago while visiting New Zealand.)

Before we get to this month's question, note that in chapter 1 of *The Experience Economy*, we cite the chapter names of Peter Guttman's 1997 book, *Adventures to Imagine: Thrilling Escapes in North America* (Houseboating, Portgaging, Mountain Biking, and so forth) to introduce the need to "ing the thing". For in English, words that end in "ing" (gerunds for you grammar mavens) mean one is experiencing that thing.

As a further aside, foreign rights publishers somehow have managed to translate "ing the thing" into ten other languages, mangling it, we're sure, in some instances. A sampling:

Dutch: Maak er een activiteit van

German: Verpack das Ding in ein Erlebnis

Spanish: Convertir la cosa en un hacer

Portuguese: Transformando objetos em ações

Well, at least the Turkish sounds poetic: Hareketin Bereketi!

In workshops we encourage participants to think in terms of words ending in "ing" -- first listing those such words already in one's normal business lexicon but neglected as fodder for better experience-staging, but then also in terms of creating brand new ing words to see where they lead. Zorb represents an example of the second kind. It's a new word for a new experience, as no existing word suffices to describe the offering.

**Our question:** Create-a-word... what *new-to-the-world* experience should you stage?

### #2. LandsEnd.com

The second website in our countdown, [LandsEnd.com](http://LandsEnd.com), made the list because of how successfully it has implemented mass customized apparel. (On the site, look for the link on the right for "Lands' End Custom Clothing".) It mass customizes jeans, chinos, blouses, and dress pants and shirts to one's own unique specifications, with delivery in 3-4 weeks.

If you haven't already, do go through the online ordering process to see what it's like, even if you don't actually intend on buying. Lands' End asks you to make a series of choices regarding color, fabric, and style options, and then requests that you enter measurements for waist and inseam (down to the quarter-inch!). Then a set of other questions around in-the-ballpark-but-not-quite-sure-how-it-relates issues, like your weight, neck size, and even shoe size, are posed. Land's End uses this final data to correlate these factors with a mathematical model of your body, which then determines what all the actual measurements of the garment will be.

Also note the small "Powered by ARCHETYPE" notation at the site. This company, led by Robert Holloway, was created by some disaffected Levi's employees, who felt the company never put its full muscle behind its own custom jeans program a number of years ago, and felt sure that they could make it work. And so they did!



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In bringing ARCHETYPE's turnkey system to Lands' End, management at the latter company had a spirited discussion as to how big mass customized apparel would be for them. The consensus was that custom apparel could drive at most 5% of its online sales. The naysayers said it would be a nit, only 1%, while a few optimistic folks felt they could hit 10%. While the company thought they could make money at the 5% level, within six months of launch over 40% of online sales were mass customized, with some items hitting 60%! Now almost every apparel manufacturer is working on some version of this approach, many of them backed by ARCHETYPE.

**Our question:** What *online customization* could you offer?

P.S. Also check out, if you haven't seen already, the customized jeans on the cover of Joe's first book, [Mass Customization](#).

## #1. The Cerritos Public Library

Our 2003 Experience Stager of the Year is the "world's first experience library", as City Librarian Waynn Pearson likes to describe it.

The new Cerritos Public Library (<http://www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/library/>) opened in March, 2002, with the theme of "traveling through time". Outside, the white facade on the first floor represents libraries of the past; the titanium structure soaring into the sky represents the libraries of the future. Every area in the place is themed after a different point in time, including a classic, art deco, and futuristic areas. The Children's Library includes a prehistoric area with a full-sized replica of a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

The library excels at bringing its collection into the era of the Internet, with over 200 computers through which patrons can access the Internet, various subscription databases, and an intranet with such wonderful tools as "wordsurfing" to find new resources. It hasn't forgotten its heritage, of course, adding over 100,000 books to the collection when it moved into its new space.

We could go on and on, but we've already published extensively on the place in our invitation to the 2004 thinkAbout (<http://www.strategichorizons.com/shthinkAbout.html>) which we held...at the Cerritos Public Library! It proved a wonderful venue for thought-provoking exploration into the Experience Economy.

Let us take the time, however, to mention two items briefly. First, the upshot: as a testament to the library experience, in a town of a little over 50,000 people, on average over 3,500 use the library every day.

Second, one of the reasons they do so is the great opening and closing rituals Waynn and his colleagues instituted. Every morning before it opens, people gather underneath a portico where a flat-panel TV shows a countdown clock. As it gets down to the time, people start counting with it -- 10, 9, 8, 7 -- getting more excited as they go -- 6, 5, 4 -- until finally they shout out -- 3, 2, 1! And then the doors immediately open. In the evening -- you know what problems libraries have shooping people out of all the nooks and crannies -- the library staff simply announces that the library is about to close and everyone comes down to the main lobby, where another huge flat-panel TV ends the day by showing the scene from the Sound of Music where all the kids sing, "So long! Farewell! Auf wiedersehen, goodbye!" Everyone joins in, knowing that by the time the last Van Trapp leaves the scene in the movie, they, too, have to leave the library!

**Our question:** What *opening and closing rituals* should you establish?

*For more details about the Top Ten and to register for the next Strategic Horizons thinkAbout, visit us at [www.StrategicHorizons.com](http://www.StrategicHorizons.com) or call +1 (330) 405-2886. © 2004 Strategic Horizons LLP.*



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