



Learning Las Vegas

“Everything
in Las Vegas
is coming
to your
town.”

With its gambling and entertainment, neon lights and water shows, theme restaurants and even better themed shopping malls, roller coasters, golf clubs, and a plethora of other sensational venues, surely Las Vegas is the experience capital of the world, bar none.

But consider this startling fact: *Everything in Las Vegas is coming to your town.* The Experience Economy—exemplified most visibly and lavishly in Vegas—is changing the very fabric of the everyday places in which we work and live. Every city looks more like Las Vegas every day.

As experience stagers, what can you learn from Las Vegas? Here are but a few such lessons on how your town, and your business, can stage more engaging experiences.

Mark the spot. Today, neon reigns – from the nightlights of South Beach Miami to the skyline of notoriously conservative Cincinnati. In Cleveland, its Bicentennial Commission spent \$4 million to colorfully illuminate the industrial bridges that cross the Cuyahoga River. When restoring the Washington Monument, the project crew turned the scaffolding into a giant light show.

Like the famed lights of Vegas, each serves to mark a site worth seeing, an experience worth visiting. In the most spectacular cases—such as The Fremont Street Experience, designed by architect and placemaker Jon Jerde—the marker becomes the experience itself, drawing guests that then funnel into otherwise marker-less experiences.

So how can you mark your experience? Neon, searchlights, or a public show (such as the Pirate show at Treasure Island) are all options. Perhaps you can band together with nearby experience stagers to create a huge spectacle, as happened on Fremont Street. Whatever route you go, strive to make your markers experiences in their own right.

Experientialize! Think slot machines, rotating their dials and dropping coins to winners – but always with clanging bells, twirling lights, or hollering hosts. Such sights and sounds can now be found in even the smallest of hometown venues. Witness the ubiquitous candy machines, such as “Gumball Wizards,” that spiral gumballs round and round before dispensing. Other pinball-machine

versions have each “player” bat the gumball back and forth before it drains down the center. Still others are kinetic sculptures, with the gumball traversing a plethora of pathways to get out. They’re your town’s slot machines!

Like all the (literal) bells and whistles on slots, these gumball machines feature no functional improvement. The delivery service is in fact worse: it takes more time to get the good after placing the order! But surrounding the gumball with an engaging experience clearly drives demand up.

What goods does your business sell, rent, give away, or otherwise dispense? From tickets to tokens, programs to prizes, food to furnishings, and from equipment to memorabilia—make the receiving and using of your goods an experience.

Rotate realms. Las Vegas venues started out as pure *escapist* experiences. Very soon casino proprietors added *entertainment* experiences, turning each into a spectacle. With Steve Wynn came a shift into *esthetic* experiences—themed casinos, each one more over the top than the last. Finally, Wynn embraced *educational* experiences with his Fine Arts Gallery in Bellagio’s.

Similarly, cities everywhere are aiming for the sweet spot by attracting, supporting, and even subsidizing experience venues that round out these four realms. We see it in entertainment districts: the educational panache of local Guggenheim branches (including soon at The Venetian!); the escapist theme parks, golf courses, and, yes, casinos themselves dotting the landscape; and in the wonderful esthetic of the new “old” ballparks built or being built in nearly every major league city.

Perhaps your business can expand into other experiential realms. Certainly you can ask of your own experience: What could be added for customers to *enjoy*? To *learn*? To *do*? And to *be*?

These are but a few of the lessons you can learn from Las Vegas today. So study its practices—and turn your space into a better place.

Care to learn more from Las Vegas? Then join Joe Pine & Jim Gilmore, authors of The Experience Economy, at their fourth annual thinkAbout event to be held there on September 12+13, 2001. To find out more, visit www.customization.com/think.