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A Journey Lost

My column "A Road Less Traveled" appeared in the March issue of CSP. It dealt with aspects of seeking alternative solutions and applications for how facilities address the needs and wants of the marketplace. It was my intent to do a follow-up piece for this month's column. However, I came to a "fork in the road." I took part in an event that created "A Journey Lost" for many who participated.

Part of nearly every annual industry gathering is a "store/outlet/unit tour" of facilities within the host city. It is an opportunity for attendees to see (and, we hope, learn from) the "best in class" of that chosen locale. I went on one such recent tour, and it was an eye-opening experience for an unexpected reason. It provided excellent examples of not "going to market" with the proper facility; trying to create a trade area and need where there are none; embracing that absolutely false theory of "build it and they will come"; and letting the same tired, worn-out unit just keep on keeping on.

BEWARE THE FIVE TYPES

It is easier to paint a written picture of the five "types" by naming each:

► **The Old Golden Goose:** Worn-out, tired offering that provides an excellent "yarn factor" for employees and patrons alike. Neglected, outdated and reminiscent of what was and should no longer be. The Golden Goose is being tended to by goose herders who appear unable to speak, let alone acknowledge and give thanks to customers. The result: never-ending decline in the level of golden-egg production.

► **The Impossible:** "We will make this fit no matter what." A newer co-branded (national foodservice offering) facility that was developed on a site that proves to be nearly unbuildable relative to retail usage in terms of size, configuration, visibility, accessibility and exposure. The result: an operational unit that does not gain strength from the co-branded relationship; exhibits minimal arterial presence; and endures significant on-site movement congestion, functional conflict and low levels of patronage.

► **The Taj Mahal:** A monument to ego and self-aggrandizement. It is possible to overbuild to serve an actual need that exists in the marketplace. It's a facility (including land) that cost more than $3.5 million to develop that currently averages, on a monthly basis, 140,000 gallons in fuel, $120,000 inside sales (including proprietary deli) and $5,500 extended conveyor car wash. The store offering consists of more than 5,000 square feet, of which approximately 30% is unused. Can anyone make the numbers work?

► **The Spit Wad:** The "Let's throw it all at them and see if any of it sticks" philosophy of store design and profit centers. It's a facility that has too much fueling capacity (for existing volume potential), closed lube center/detail bays, closed branded foodservice program, an underperforming full-service car wash and an over-capacity/non-delivering proprietary foodservice offering. The result: a facility that appears (and is) out-of-sync in every phase of operation.

► **The Cave (of Dark and Dampness):** "We do not like light, brightness, exposure or a warm and inviting interior environment." It's simply not inviting on any levels; it creates no reason for an individual to patronize this specific location, let alone make it part of his/her life. The result: absolute dullness and non-performance.

So do any of these sound familiar? Do examples of these exist in some or all of the markets within which you operate? If so, these facilities present positive opportunities for companies looking to gain entry into new trade areas and markets, potentially allowing for significant positions and performance growth. Market awareness is critical for remaining fully engaged with overall environments that shift each and every day—because the concept never changes, but the marketplace always does. ■