

Planning the Premium Experience

The “premium” or “first-class” movie-going experience is becoming increasingly popular. However, not just the preserve of the major theatre operator, **Paul Georges & Robert McCall** of architectural practice JKR Partners, outline how smaller exhibitors, too, may offer the premium experience.

In past years, the movie industry has experienced a trend by most major exhibitors to offer guests a premium movie-viewing experience. This type of presentation, once the domain of IMAX large-format, is now offered by national exhibitors. Although this trend is presently dominated by the majors, it is also possible for smaller, independent, operators to offer their own premium movie experience. Through careful planning, design, and the appropriate technical support, independents too can capitalize on the same revenue opportunities of the high-end movie concept.

BIG SCREEN, SPECIAL FEEL

It all starts with a movie presentation incorporating enhanced sound and projection. Maximizing screen-size is key. If you are building a new theater, then planning for that larger auditorium begins at the project’s design stage. Auditoriums should be developed to offer wall-to-wall screens with sufficient ceiling height to take full advantage of image width-to-height ratios. To maximize the “wow” effect, screens are sized for floor-to-ceiling installation. If an existing auditorium needs converting, exhibitors must make the necessary modifications to accommodate the bigger screen. Limitations of the existing building may require significant alterations – again, typically at the screen-end of the auditorium – and may include raising the roof structure and ceiling, or perhaps lowering the floor-level to accommodate the screen. With the larger screens, it is paramount to maintain unobstructed views to the bottom of the projection image. Along with the “big picture,” powerful digital sound and expanded speaker coverage help complete the presentation experience.

SUPERIOR

While expanded sound and projection remain at the core of the extreme experience, exhibitors need to promote in such a way as to convince patrons to willingly pay increased ticket prices. The rule is to identify and promote features

that best differentiate the experience from the standard auditorium offering. Patrons should feel that the auditorium they are entering is superior in every way. This is the branding of the premium auditorium as something different. As the major exhibitors have also done, the premium auditorium should have its own identity and be emphasized from the moment patrons enter the site.

The auditorium entry is, in essence, the façade of the auditorium. Decorative lighting, signage and unique materials, should adorn the upgraded auditorium entrance, signaling to patrons that this is going to be something special. Once inside, it is the screen-size that provides the greatest impact, its sheer presence building anticipation of the main coming attraction.

Other important design elements include amenity and finish. Wider, more comfortable, seating upholstered in luxurious fabrics and leathers are instrumental to the experience and will certainly be appreciated by patrons. Meanwhile, the finish selections complete the scene. Wall treatments and lighting should represent an upgrade that offers a more luxurious surrounding. Fabrics in a variety of patterns, textures and colors, different from the norm, are available for the selection of wall treatments.

Whether included in a newbuild theater development or as a new offering to an existing venue, a premium movie-going experience is possible for all exhibitors; and, with careful planning and the appropriate support, exhibitors can realize their vision and enjoy the best return on investment. **S**

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