Giants
of Tourism

Edited by
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"WALT DISNEY'S WORLD OF ENTERTAINMENT
ATTRACTIONS"
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WALT DISNEY'S WORLD OF ENTERTAINMENT ATTRACTIONS

INTRODUCTION

"I believe in being an innovator."
(Walt Disney, n.d., cited in Smith, 2001, p. 211)

Very few names are as closely linked with entertainment and quality experiences as Walt Disney. The perceptions around the design and operation of amusement parks changed forever, as a result of Disney' ideas and actions. So revolutionary and innovative were his thoughts that their influence went far beyond merely shaping the nature of modern amusement attractions. The innovative concepts that Disney introduced have also been successfully applied to other tourism, hospitality and service segments, such as restaurants, shopping centres and airports. Social and cultural critics have even claimed that the principles of Disney's theme parks have spread to wider sectors of society, in what has been termed "the Disneyzation of society" (Bryman, 1999). His unique management style, insisting on high quality and emphasising strong organizational culture, have also aroused great interest and set new standards. For hundreds of millions of people around the world Walt Disney is synonym of safe, clean, decent, ground-breaking, imaginary, technologically advanced, high-quality, innocent and family-oriented American entertainment. It also should be noted, however, that Disney – the person, and well as the brand – is perceived in certain circles as a controversial phenomenon, representing shallowness, intellectual decay and Americanised cultural colonialism.

The purpose of this chapter is to present Walt Disney's prominent contributions to and influence on the entertainment industry, as well as on other sectors of society, including management, in general. Although some of the concepts associated with his name, such as theming and merchandising, may not have been invented by Disney, he undoubtedly turned these

notions into an art form, outlining the principles of managing and operating attractions and amusement parks in the new era. Interestingly, Walt Disney, one of the most influential people regarding the characteristics of tourism and hospitality, only entered the industry at a later stage in life. Nevertheless, the principles that guided him in envisioning, planning and managing his attractions are deeply rooted in his life story. After a short description of Disney's pre-Disneyland days, the chapter discusses the five main ways in which Disney revolutionised entertainment attractions, as well as businesses in other sectors: by incorporating storytelling and technological advancements, integrating education and entertainment, adopting a management style that emphasises organizational culture and customer service, and changing in the consumers' consumption habits, particularly regarding their leisure patterns and the enormous appeal of merchandising.

IN THE BEGINNING

"An unhappy childhood doesn't kill."
(Karlgaard, 2006, p. 33).

Walter Elias Disney was born in Chicago in 1901. Following his father's restless search for jobs and success, the Disney family experienced constant relocations and instability (Mosely, 1985). From a young age, Walt demonstrated unusual artistic skills, and was particularly interested in drawing. Following his service as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross, during the First World War, he worked as an illustrator and a cartoonist in Kansas City, but always aspired at becoming independent (Gabler, 2006). Disney had a difficult start as an independent entrepreneur, making poor managerial decisions, and his first company declared bankruptcy. Determined to pave his way into the entertainment business, Disney moved to Hollywood in 1923, where he and his brother founded the Disney Brothers Studio. They launched the

successful cartoon series, entitled *Alice in Wonderland* and *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit*, but naively lost the copyrights of the latter to their distributor, who hired Disney's animators in an attempt to keep the *Oswald* franchise away from Disney (Rukstad & Collis, 2001).

Lacking any other option, Disney moved to create a new character to replace *Oswald*: a mouse-type character, known for his big ears and endless optimism. Although Disney initially wanted to name the character "Mortimer Mouse", he eventually listened to his wife Lillian and named him *Mickey Mouse*, in what was declared by Crainer (1999) as the one of the greatest management decisions ever made. Later, there came other world-famous cartoons such as *Goofy* and *Donald Duck*, and the first full-length, fully-coloured animated film: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in 1937. After World War II, the company began to produce live action films, such as *The 101 Dalmatians* (1961), and *Mary Poppins* (1964). To this date, Walt Disney is perceived as one of the most legendary Hollywood figures of all times, holding the record for Academy Award nominations (fifty-nine) and awarded Oscars (twenty-six, including an Honorary Award for the creation of *Mickey Mouse*).

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

"If Walt had a genius, it was the ability to recognize a story line. And that's what Disneyland provides...stories."
Michael Broggie, son of Disney's first imagineer, Roger Broggie (cited in Gutierrez, 2005, p. 15).

Despite his beginning as a young cartoonist and his deep association with his animated characters, soon after the introduction of *Mickey Mouse*, Disney realized that his strength did not lie in animation, and he stopped drawing. Instead, he was revealed to himself and to others as a great storyteller and as a story editor. As noted by Croce (1991, p. 93), "(He) had an excellent sense of story. He could look at a draft series of sketches for a cartoon and spot what parts

needed more drama and where the narrative had gone on too long". His extraordinary talent as a storyteller was also used to inspire his employees and to put his vision into words. For example, when announcing his top animators about his intention to launch the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Gabler (2006) described that Disney "...told the story of Snow White, not just telling it but acting it out, assuming the characters' mannerisms, putting on their voices, letting his audience visualize exactly what they would be seeing on the screen. He became Snow White and the wicked queen and each of the dwarfs". This appreciation of a good story and the ability to effectively and enjoyably tell it was to be his most meaningful contribution to the nature and characteristics of contemporary attractions and amusement parks.

As noted earlier, the link between Disney and the tourism and leisure industry developed at a later stage in his life. Disney used to take his daughters to the traditional amusement parks that were so prevalent in the pre-Disneyland era. These parks were for the most part a coincidental and unrelated collection of thrill rides, barkers, shows, food and beverage stands, and chance games played for prizes. Disney saw these parks as meaningless, simplistic and unclean places, operated by dubious people, offering no appropriate activity for the parents. As a result, he began to toy with the idea of a different type of outdoor entertainment park, that would provide a wholesome, safe, and educational experience for the entire family – children and adults alike (King, 1981). Disney began to design Disneyland in 1952, loaning millions of dollars to finance this adventure.

The park finally opened in 1955, and was an instant success, that finally put the Disney enterprise on a solid financial path (Rukstad & Collis, 2001). Disneyland, as well the Disney theme parks that followed, are divided into a number of plots, each representing a unique theme or story, with coordinated attractions, such as Main Street, Frontierland, Tomorrowland,

Fantasyland, and Adventureland. Main Street is the central area in the park, a tribute to American life at the beginning of the twentieth century, mostly depicting images from Marceline, Missouri, where Disney spent four years of his childhood (including a bakery, a barbershop, and the Main Street Cinema). Frontierland is dedicated to the American Wild West in the 19th century; Tomorrowland simulates the life in the future; Fantasyland provides attractions themed after Disney's films; and Adventureland is designed to recall distant jungles around the world.

As noted by Milman (2008), Disneyland marked a turning point in the amusement business. The traditional amusement parks depicted above were replaced by a clean, high-quality and secure environment. Above all, the most significant innovation found at Disneyland was the concept, which would later be termed "theming". In relation to amusement parks, this concept refers to the idea of organizing areas, architecture, rides, shows, costumed personnel, foodservices, and merchandize, all under a one or more dominant themes (Milman, 1993). More generally, a themed environment can be defined as "a place for the entertainment of its visitors in which everything has been designed to tell a story in which the visitor is encouraged to play a part" (McGoun, Dunkaka, Bettner, & Allen, 2003, p. 649).

As can be seen, at the heart of the theming concept lies the art of storytelling – the ability to convey any experience with a certain narrative, whether it is educational, fantastic, historic, or other. As put by Martin "Marty" A. Sklar, a former vice-chairman of Walt Disney Imagineering, the R&D division of Walt Disney Parks & Resorts: "Everything we do starts with the kind of story we want to tell, whether it's the Haunted Mansion or Pirates of the Caribbean. Space Mountain itself has a story. Even Rock 'n' Roller Coaster has to have a story line. Everything we do has a story" (Travel Agent, 2001, p. 2).

Like any good story, Disney's parks aim to immerse the guests in the atmosphere of each specific themed area and attraction. In order to allow the guests to become absorbed in the fantasy, it was important for Disney to shut out the "real world" for the guests. He decided to implement actions that were quite unorthodox in the then-prevalent mainstream amusement parks. First of all, despite the commercial image of the parks today, Disney actually attempted to neutralize the constant money exchange that was so prevalent in the traditional amusement parks, where guests usually paid both admission price and a fee for each attraction they attended inside the park (Milman, 2008). Disney anticipated that this constant money exchange would be a distraction, preventing the guests from immersing themselves in the stories and the fantasy of the park. Instead, Disney initiated a system where the exchange of money is kept to a minimum, outside the gates of the parks, where the guests are charged for a single entrance fee, and all the activities (excluding food and beverage, and merchandize) are covered by this fee (King, 1981).

Another ground-breaking idea formulated by Disney in order to ensure the effectiveness of the themed environments, was the construction of the "utilidors" in Magic Kingdom, at Disney World, a park that was completed and opened to the public in 1971, five years after Disney died from lung cancer. Although Disneyland was well accepted by visitors, Disney was not completely satisfied with the final result. He was especially concerned with the fact that certain operational routines might interfere with the hegemonic fantasy he wanted to create, such as employees and actors crossing different themed lands, for garbage collection and technology operation, thereby interfering with the integrity and the unique atmosphere of each area. His vision was to create an "underground world", best known as the "utilidors", built under the Magic Kingdom, which would include tunnels enabling all the necessary procedures for the operation of the park that unrelated to the guests' experience, to be carried out. Today the 1.25

miles of the utilidors covers, among others, access roads for deliveries, animation control systems, dressing rooms for the employees, and a cafeteria (Pike, 2005). By carefully hiding the "backstage", the guests are only exposed to the front stage and left to fully experience the sites.

Another concern that Disney had with Disneyland was the dissatisfaction with the non-Disney venues, such as hotels and restaurants, which soon developed around the park following its phenomenal success. His solution for Disney World would be a wholesale tour operator, designing and operating its own resort and hotel businesses (Friedlander, 1971) and, at a later stage, night clubs and golf courses, all of which would correspond to the unique Disney atmosphere (Pike, 2005).

This new type of an amusement parks, which were soon termed "theme parks", began to be imitated by competitors (e.g., Six Flags Parks, Kings Islands, and Great adventure), albeit without achieving the same level of success. The theme park industry dramatically changed the entertainment business, and today, it is considered one of the favourite modes of mass entertainment (Milman, 2001). Rubin (2007) reports that in 2006, 185.6 million people visited the world's top 25 theme parks (i.e. parks with over 3.9 million visitors annually). The Walt Disney Company is still the undisputed leader in the industry, with 112.5 million visitors to its 13 parks worldwide, annually. According to the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA), more than 600 theme parks operate in America alone, while it is estimated that half of all American have visited at least one of these parks. Theme parks visitors also spend more money, compared to other travellers (Milman, 2008).

The concept of theming is also being embraced by other economical sectors. Bryman (1999) describes how many areas of contemporary economic life are being themed, such as restaurant chains, pubs, hotels, cruises and shopping mall, all of which are designed to provide a

themed environment. One of the prominent themed environments nowadays is Las Vegas, where it is highly popular for hotels to be themed. To name a few examples, the Caesars Hotel is themed after Ancient Rome, Luxor after Ancient Egypt and MGM Grand, after popular films.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) go even further, and suggest that modern society has entered a stage they call "The Experience Economy", where companies are required to not only provide quality goods and services, but also memorable experiences. They refer to Walt Disney as "the experience-economy pioneer", and argued that although experiences have always been at the centre of amusement and entertainment parks, entertaining experiences should take place even in businesses, such as retail stores, grocery shops, airlines, banks and even insurance companies, since it is expected by today's customers. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), the central element for a business in entering the experience economy is to choose a concise and compelling storyline (theme) and to stage the environment accordingly. Most importantly, theming enables companies to differentiate themselves and satisfy today's customer who seeks variety and uniqueness.

TECHNO-TAINMENT

"We need our own 2005 EPCOT where we can reassert our technology leadership and vision. We need a Walt Disney."
(Briere, 2005, p. 41)

One of the most prominent characteristics of Walt Disney was his technophilia, i.e. his strong enthusiasm for new technologies and technological progress. Disney's entire career was characterized by a constant search for the next technology edge (Gabler, 2006). His keenness to embrace technological innovations was apparent far before his theme parks' era. From the outset of his Disney Brothers Studio in Hollywood in 1923, Walt was the creative force behind the

company, while his brother Roy was responsible for most of the financial aspects of the company

(Rukstad & Collis, 2001). In searching for creative inventions, Disney provided some of the

ground-breaking developments in the film industry. Disney's third film and the first Mickey

Mouse cartoon, *Steamboat Willie* (1928), was the first cartoon to synchronize sound and motion,

and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was the first full-length animated film ever

produced (Grover, 2004).

Disney's passion for technological innovations was adequately reflected in his

entertainment parks, setting high standards for the theme parks' industry in the years to follow.

His belief in technology and progress led him to envision and design his parks as platforms for

technological experiments and as displays of state-of-the-art scientific developments, yet always

in a way that complemented the entertainment and education aspects of the parks. In doing, so he

formed, in 1952, the WED Enterprises (WED: Walter Elias Disney), best known as Walt Disney

Imagineering, which was responsible for the design and construction of his theme parks. Today,

it has become part of the Walt Disney Productions, as the R&D division of the company.

Although the term "Imagineering" was in use before Walt Disney, it is mainly associated with

him and his theme parks. Imagineering stands for the combination of artistic imagination and

engineering, which has been the prominent guideline in constructing Disney's parks (Croce,

1991), and later became the general norm in the theme parks and attractions industry (Formica &

Olsen, 1998).

King (1991) stated that "Disney 'Imagineers' have been prime instigators in researching

and developing concepts in this magical terrain between art and science" (p. 27). The most

significant and cutting-edge imagineering innovation was, undoubtedly, the development of the

Audio-Animatronics technology. Audio-Animatronics is a form of robotics, in which the body

language and facial motions of the robots, which are animated by means of electromechanical devices, are synchronized with a recorded speech (Sempere, 2005). One of the earliest and most influential demonstrations of Audio-Animatronics technology was displayed by Disney at the New York World Fair in 1964, where Walt Disney presented a robotic Abraham Lincoln character in the attraction "Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln", which was to become a prominent attraction at Disneyland and Disney World. To this date Audio-Animatronics represent an integral and crucial element in advanced theme parks and attractions, with established companies specializing in designing and developing animatronics for these venues (Miller, 2008). Yet, despite the innumerable imitators, Disney's parks have remained in the technological cutting edge in this field. Recently, Walt Disney Imagineering introduced Lucky the Dinosaur, the first audio-animatronics figure operated independently, without been anchored and tethered to a power source or motion systems (Zoltak, 2003).

Disney's parks have made other numerous pioneering contributions to the attractions and theme parks industry. Ruben (2005) mentioned other noteworthy innovations. For example, Disney was the first to use monorail in the Western Hemisphere, a unique transportation system which is also an attraction in itself. Additionally, Disney was the first to employ tubular steel rails on a rollercoaster, in 1959, when the Matterhorn Bobsleds was opened in Disneyland. He also pioneered the von Roll sky-rides, which offer visitors an extended above-ground view as they pass over the entire park (King, 1981). Disney parks were also among the firsts to use dark rides in their attractions. A dark ride is "an indoor amusement ride that carries riders through animated, painted, or special-effect created scenes" (Ellis, 2008). Prominent earlier examples are "It's a Small World" and "Pirates of the Caribbean". More recently, Walt Disney World introduced the first re-programmable attraction, The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, a freefall

elevator ride, which is constantly updated. Disney Imagineering also developed a new fireworks launching system, based on compressed air, which results in cleaner, safer and more stimulating pyrotechnics (Ruben, 2005).

The strong orientation of Disney's parks toward technological innovation is not only aimed at creating and improving the guests' experience of the rides and shows. Disney parks have also incorporated innovative systems, in order to improve the efficiency and control in managing the sites. For examples, the aforementioned utilidors of Magic Kingdom in Disney World contain a sophisticated automatic garbage collection system, which is the largest in the world and the first to be installed in the US (Pike, 2005). Disney parks have always been innovative in queuing management techniques, as long queues are known to be a recurring guest complaint. One of the revolutionary developments in this regard was the introduction of the FastPass in 1999, the first system that allows the visitors to make reservations to busy rides, in order to avoid long waiting in lines (O'Brien, 2000). The parks have also developed a system that enables cars to park more quickly and conveniently (Ruben, 2005).

Disney aspired for his parks to serve as a more than advanced version of amusement parks. His concern for modern urban life, characterized by transportation problems, pollution, and a hostile environment, led him to design the parks with the intention of finding solutions for the problems in city planning and ecology (King, 1981). Indeed, the unique, advanced, efficient and friendly design of the Disney theme parks have become a model for architects, urban planners and designers around the world (Francaviglia, 1981). Disney also envisioned the new section to be built in Disney World, EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow), to be an actual city that "would showcase man's latest concepts on how a city could be designed, built and operated" (McLain, 2005). The plan, however, was not carried out, and

EPCOT has turned to the second theme park in Disney World area, dedicated both to displaying technological innovations, and serving as a permanent world fair showcasing international cultures.

Disney parks' technological advancement and sophistication has set the pace for the attractions and theme parks industry. As a result, the great interest of contemporary theme parks in technology has brought them closer to the more futuristic science museums (King, 1991). In addition to the crucial function of technology in entertaining and educating the visitors, improving the rides and shows, and providing new excitement for the demanding modern customers, it has also significantly assisted theme parks in their everyday operations. Formica and Olsen (1998) state that technology provides solutions to many of the challenges faced by a theme park management, such as health and safety, distribution channels, queue management, crowdedness relief, payment systems, and rides operation. Many of these technological developments have enabled theme parks to reduce personnel, cut expenses, and improve the overall management control.

EDU-TAINMENT

"We have long held that the normal gap between what is generally regarded as 'entertainment' and what is defined as 'educational' represents an old and untenable viewpoint."
(Walt Disney, n.d., cited in Anonymous, 1975, p. 20)

The notion that entertainment and education are not contradictory and can (and should) be successfully incorporated together was fundamental in Walt Disney's worldview. After Disney's death, Izard (1967) stated that Disney "was master of communications who brought together both entertainment and education in a distinctive way" (p. 36). His movies and television shows had had an abundance of informal didactic and learning messages, while at the

same time being entertaining and amusing. Generally speaking, Disney films emphasize American-Protestant values, including individualism, decency, hard work, fair play and tolerance (Izard, 1967). Disney initiated live-action nature films, depicting wildlife in their natural habitat, allowing the vast majority of viewers to experience nature in a way that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. Many of the films and series have dealt with historical events and figures, providing an interpretation of American history and folklore. Other educational themes included issues such as cultural understanding, familiarization with geographical areas of the world, music, imagination and creativity (Izard, 1967).

Walt Disney was also the most influential pioneer in turning edutainment into an integral function of theme parks. As a nostalgic person constantly longing for his childhood, Disney designed and built Main Street, U.S.A. as a replica of the Main Street in Merceline, Missouri, where he spent four years as a child. The broader purpose of the site was to conserve and perpetuate the unique atmosphere of small cities at the turn of the 20th century, to evoke a sense of nostalgia among adults, and to generate understanding among adolescents about the urban landscape their grandparents grew up in (Veltman, 2004). Other areas in the parks also aim at presenting the Disney narrative of American history (e.g. the American colonial era), values, and ideals, or in the words of Disney himself, to serve as "museum of living facts" (Schaffer, 1996).

Despite the powerful influence of these parks, shaping the presentation of the past for millions of both American and international visitors (Weiner, 1997), social critics described the Disney interpretation of history as "sanitized reality", presenting a sterile version of America where unpleasant historical facts are omitted (Salamone & Salamone, 1999). Rojek (1993), for example, argued that in Disney' parks "the history of racial and sexual repression is systematically neglected" (p. 129). Nevertheless, it has been argued that Disney parks play an

important role in instructing visitors about the basic values and assumptions of American society and culture. King (1981) even stated that "Disney's Mickey Mouse has been the ambassador of American popular culture since the 1930s, even in the most inaccessible corners of the world" (p. 129). It should be noted, however, that the Disney experience, as a representative of the American culture, has not always been well-received internationally. The most prominent example is the opening of Euro Disney in Paris in 1992, which was followed with protests by the French intellectual elite, who warned of a potential "cultural Chernobyl" taking place in France (Rukstad & Collis, 2001).

Today, the Disney parks maintain a strong didactic side. For example, Disney World's Animal Kingdom, which opened in 1998, is a modern, themed zoo that delivers a vast number of conservation and ecological messages, as part of its exhibits and shows. However, Disney's didactic aspiration to shape the American collective interpretation of history has its limitations. In 1994, the company pulled back from the plan to build an American history theme park in Northern Virginia, on one of the bloodiest battle sites of the Civil War, after it became the object of harsh criticism from historians and environmentalists, as being inappropriate and historically misleading (The Economist, 1998; Ruggless, 1994).

Edutainment has become an important component in many other theme parks which, it is often argued, serve as modern museums and history parks (King, 1991). King (1991) also pointed to the growing tendency of museums to adopt theme park concepts in their operations, especially in creating wholesome themed environments. In a study conducted by Milman (2001), it was found that theme parks and attractions' general managers, who took part in a survey, believe that educational themes will continue to dominate in the future.

DISNEY-STYLE MANAGEMENT

"You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful place in the world, but it requires people to make the dream a reality."
(Walt Disney, n.d., cited in Smith, 2001, p. 95)

Walt Disney has left his mark not only on the entertainment and services industries, but also on contemporary corporate management, in general. As noted by Greco (1999), Disney – in addition to contributing innovative ideas on entertainment and technology – was also a new type of manager, emphasizing managerial practices that were relatively unexplored concepts in his days. One of his major contributions in this regard was his recognition, among the first business leaders, of the importance of a strong organizational culture. As noted by Rukstad and Collis (2001), from the onset, the Disney brothers ran their company unconventionally, as a non-hierarchical organization, in which both the employees and the managers (including Walt himself) called each other by their first names. Nevertheless, he was a tough, challenging and control-driven boss, demanding perfection from himself and his employees (Gabler, 2006).

As part of his attempts to have full control over all aspects of his business operations, one of his main efforts was to get his employees to fully identify with the organization's norms, values, and vision (Croce, 1991). In order to achieve this goal, Disney invested considerable resources in training and instructing employees, prior to their employment in the theme parks. In 1955, the Disneyland University was established, which provides a mandatory orientation week for all new employees, during which they are educated on the traditions of the corporation, its policies and guiding principles (MacDonald, 2005). Collins and Porras (1996) detailed the core values of Disney: (1) no cynicism; (2) nurturing and promulgation of "wholesome American values"; (3) creativity, dreams, and imagination; (4) fanatical attention to consistency and details; and (4) preservation and control of the Disney magic.

Disney has used various rituals and symbols to enhance the sense of belonging of his employees to the company and to create a sense of community and teamwork. Examples include using employee nametags, adhering to a strict set of appearance rules, and creating a new language to be used by the park employees (e.g., "cast members" for employees and "guests" for visitors/customers). This socialization – along with strict, albeit costly, supervision - allows Disney to achieve the control and standardization of the park operations and to avoid deviance from the desired atmosphere and behaviour (Van Maanen, 1991).

When discussing the influence of Disney parks on society, Bryman (1999) argues that 'emotional labour' is one of the dominant concepts that are exceptionally exemplified by Disney, and which now dominate wider sectors of the American and international economies. "Emotional labour" is defined as a "control over the employee so that socially desired emotions are exhibited during service transactions" (Bryman, 2003, p. 135). The employees in Disney parks are expected to be joyful, smiling, and courteous to visitors, at all times. The intention is to convey the impression that the employees – just like the visitors – are having fun, and are not actually engaging in "real work" (Bryman, 1999). Needless to say, although this approach had numerous followers, it was also severely criticised by social critics (Van Maanen, 1991).

Nevertheless, Disney has introduced a revolutionary philosophy on how to take care of customers, believing that it is possible to efficiently handle large numbers of people as welcomed guests, with respect and courtesy (Croce, 1991; King, 1981). The striving for perfectionism in customer service is instilled in employees from their beginning in the company and is expressed in most of the company's actions. Park guests are constantly asked to provide feedback, and employees participate in feedback forums to inform managers regarding any troubling complaint or ineffective practice (MacDonald, 2005).

CHANGES IN CONSUMER HABITS

"Anything that has the Disney name to it is something we feel responsible for."
(Walt Disney, n.d., cited in Disney Dreamer, 2008)

Walt Disney's perfectionism in the production of his films often led to heavy expenses for the company. As Disney realized that profits from the films alone would be a long and difficult challenge, he had to come up with creative ideas to return the investments in his expensive films. One of the tools Disney effectively used in doing so was the "total merchandising" concept (May, 1981) which, although he did not create it, he was the first to grasp its tremendous financial potential (Bryman, 1999). Bryman (2003) defines merchandising as "the promotion of goods in the form of, or bearing, copyright images and logos, including such products made under license" (p. 155). The merchandise (e.g. records, toys, clothing, Disney book versions of classical stories) was based on Disney's movies, stories, and characters, and was available in shops before a film was released, using it as a promotion tool (May, 1981). Grant (2003) mentioned that regarding merchandising, Disney retail shops achieved some of the highest sales per square foot in the US.

Today, theme parks play an important role in Disney merchandising, both as selling points for Disney products, and as providers of their own merchandise (Bryman, 1999). Not surprisingly, various businesses and institutions, such as zoos, restaurants, clubs, sport teams, and universities, have successfully followed the Disney-style merchandising and sell extensive ranges of merchandising (Beardsworth & Bryman, 2001). Examples include T-shirts and sweatshirts, baseball cups, pens, pencils, notebooks, buttons, school bags, coffee cups, candies, and more.

Disney's contribution to the change in the consumer behaviour of contemporary customers also concerns their leisure habits. In this regard, Disney's parks remain a unique

phenomenon in the tourism and entertainment industry. While visiting the majority of attractions and theme parks represents, in most cases, a component in an entire holiday spent at a certain destination, visiting Disney parks is often perceived as an international destination in itself. The popularity of the parks and the tremendously large number of people who choose to visit them each year have turned them into equivalents of other major international tourist destinations, such as the capitals of Europe (Formica & Olsen, 1998).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

"Actually, if you could see close in my eyes, the American flag is waving in both of them and up my spine is growing this red, white, and blue stripe."
(Walt Disney, n.d., cited in Smith, 2001, p. 176).

Walt Disney had changed dramatically the nature of entertainment attractions and has impacted, more than any other person, on their important role in people's leisure and tourism behaviour. As noted by King (1991), "The universality of the "Disney experience" is the backdrop against which all other contemporary attractions must be plotted" (p. 28). Disney broke new grounds in upgrading the traditional amusement attractions to sophisticated storytelling theme parks, offering wholesome experiences to the entire families. He brought the entertainment industry to the frontline of modern technological developments, while at the same time incorporating educational contents. Disney significantly changed consumer habits of people today, and paved the way for major transformations in corporate attitude towards people management and customer service.

Although the Disney Corporation experienced dramatic transformations in the decades that followed Walt Disney's death, his core values and beliefs remain the philosophical backbone of the company. Looking at the more recent additions to the Disney theme parks and attractions,

Croce (1991) observed that "one does not have to look far to find evidence of the founder's style and values" (p. 100). Interestingly, unlike Disney's television and film productions, the Disney theme parks have enjoyed a fairly consistent level of popularity and profitability along the years (Rukstad & Collis, 2001). Despite the parks' success, the competition among theme parks and attractions is expected to remain fierce, and to place new challenges for Disney. Yet if the company is to preserve the essence of Walt Disney's spirit, as it has done so far, the increasing competition is likely to encourage the company to reach new heights. As noted by Walt Disney himself, "I have been up against competition all my life. I wouldn't know how to get along without it". Perhaps this American ideal of viewed competitiveness as a fruitful and stimulating force, rather than as a threat or a constraint, can best explain the environment in which a boy, born into an underprivileged family, grew up to become a pioneer entrepreneur, who changed the world of entertainment forever.

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