

Designing and marketing bakers' shops

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Design

During the last 10 years, the bakery industry has seen changes in product, customers' tastes and requirements. For the shopfitter, this requires sophisticated new cooled and heated sections in the counter.

Nowadays self-service cabinets for drinks and pre-packed sandwiches and cakes are required in order to cope with the customer who has little time to spare. With the centralisation of bakeries, often the area behind the shop has become vacant and can be modified into a café.

Preferably this seating area is supplied by the same counter as the shop, utilising the same staff and not duplicating the counter space. Thus the counter's functions can be further expanded to incorporate salads and cakes, further heated sections, bain-maries and space for handover.

Shopfitters face the problem that in most cases, shops have not been purpose built. Insufficient space may be available for the shop to display in ideal conditions the required amount of products.

To overcome these problems, counters and other equipment have to be tailor-made, with additional shelves which can reduce the counter length needed.

Designers try to ensure that counters run without interruption to the upper glass surface. Spaces for tills or from which to serve tables, even in a corner, interrupt the flow. Customers will queue at these points and their purchases will be lower.

An uninterrupted counter length gives the customer more choice of goods. In particular, L-shaped counters surround your customer, providing better visual contact, especially if the products are enhanced by the right lighting.

Each shelf should have its own lighting, with the correct reflector to produce a warm glow (this lighting device can be cooled if required).

Counters should have as few columns/supports as possible to create transparency. To maximise this effect, counters need to be tailor-made. 'Off the shelf' counters need double columns wherever units are placed together. The purchaser is restricted to fixed length, height and width, and limited functions which do not cater for the needs a counter must fulfil.

Nowadays there is a choice as regards front glass - straight, curved or double curved. Visibility is one reason, since 45° is the best angle for reducing reflection and glare.

The base of the counter often houses the cooling motors, storage for trays, rubbish bins, control panels and cooled refrigerated storage or heated storage, as required.

The single-level counter

'The bakery counter of the future will display fewer lines in fast selling counters,' suggests one of our competitors from Germany.

We believe that this is only partly true and that counters for the British market will require more functions and space than those for central Europe.

It is interesting to look how bakers sell their products. German products are often based on tray baking. The cake is then distributed in its baking trays and put into the counter. Here it will be cut and sold to the customer from the same tray. These trays are in general 40 x 60cm, which limits the baker to fewer lines.

These may change according to season: strawberries, plums or apples will be used as available, and there will be special weekday lines. Only two or three traditional cake lines can be purchased every day.

The result is simpler orders, bigger quantities, less waste and less double handling. But it requires bakers to 'educate' their customer and get them to accept the simplified approach - and of course, the products must be suitable for this.

The self-service unit

We have developed our own self-service unit in contrast to most shopfitting companies, who simply clad industrially produced units. We found this necessary as industrial units are much deeper and take up too much space in the shop.

Our unit achieves four levels of cooled shelving, and matches other fittings in its appearance. The counter-combination is transparent with glass shelves and glass partitions and holds twice as many goods (17.5sq ft) of shelving in one linear metre of cabinet as a two-level cooled counter (9.5sq ft over the same length).

We find that most bakery shops need a unit like this. It helps with customers who like to choose, without asking, the cold drinks, packed sandwiches, packed salads and so on which are displayed in front of them without opening doors.

Shops in inner cities are often provided with 30-40% of their total display area in self-service form.

The window bed The traditional English baker is still showing bread and ambient goods in his window bed and does most of his selling from there. Our approach is different. While we still believe that a window bed must exist, we want it transparent to show the inside of the shop and its goods in the counter and back wall areas.

The window bed is decorative and should only identify the trade. The decision about which goods to purchase should be made inside the shop, not outside.

Once inside the shop, you can influence customers to buy goods they were not intending to purchase in the first place. This is where the work of your staff starts to convince them.

Back wall

There are three main functions of a back wall:

- Display of bread, ambient goods and decorative items
- Storage of trays (below worktop level)
- Preparation area for bake-off or sandwiches, soup and tea/coffee machines, potato ovens.

A washhand basin should not be forgotten in this area. Good illumination is required to all shelving and worktops.

Where space is available and counter length is not critical, you should think about a handover rail. The customer is much closer to the bread shelves and can therefore choose better.

Suspended ceiling, wall panelling and floors

Ceilings, floors and wall claddings are three further items which give the shop its atmosphere. Textures and decorative elements emphasise the style required by the clients and can incorporate branding.

The suspended ceiling forms part of the decor of the shop and includes most of the lighting system. It can emphasise the layout of the counter, reflecting the shape as a bulkhead in the ceiling.

Lights are concentrated in the bulkhead and over the back wall. Ceiling panels and flooring can often be given a directional pattern which points towards the counter.

Illumination

Lighting your shops and merchandise is an important consideration. Lights have been developed which are economic (electricity costs have gone up 150% since the early Seventies) and fulfil your special requirements. For this purpose, all major shopfitters work together with their own lightfitting companies.

The newest lamp is a high pressure sodium lamp with 6,000 hour life expectancy and hardly any heat increase, which gives an optimum light spectrum without drying out your products.

Replacement of a light bulb costs over £30, but you need only half as many lights as the low voltage halogen lamps still common in our shops. Both lamps have a colour index of 100-80 which gives the most realistic picture of the colours.

Compact fluorescent tubes are used over back walls. For fluorescent tubes in counters and back walls, life expectancy is 7,000-8,000 hours.

The mobile shop

Shopfitters often provide a mobile shop while refurbishing works are executed, for trading should go on if possible.

A typical refitting period is only 3-8 days, and the mobile shop can be a great success. Customers see that the shop is not closed and can still buy bakery products even if the range is a bit more limited. Hardly any in practice wander off to other suppliers.

The baker/customer relationship is not interrupted, and shop staff find one week working in a mobile shop acceptable and even fun.

The baker has the bonus of additional income during installation - and some bakers make more money with the mobile shop than with their old shop. The nearer one can place the mobile shop to the existing shop, the better.

Baker/shopfitter contact

First visit: the shopfitter should establish the requirements - bakery section, takeaway, café, layout, preparation areas, invoice name and address, measure up or check existing drawings, find out overall budget and expectations of the work.

Office: Drawings and quotations.

Second visit: Show first proposal and explain - this is the shopfitter's interpretation of the discussions in the first meeting.

Office: Revise drawings and correct quotation for written offer.

Third and subsequent visits: Discuss revised drawings and quotations, colour proposal, financial package to offer the client.

Last pre-contract visit: Liaise with clients' contractors, plumber, shop front builder, suppliers of special equipment, ovens and finishing systems if it is not a turnkey installation.

Contract visit: Time schedule, final drawing and quotation, agreement of colour and finishes, signature of contract, final measurements, down payment.

Office: Working drawings are down, electrical and other services drawings drawn and co-ordinated with other trades.

Installation: Shopfittings are manufactured within four to six weeks after signature of contract, loaded on to lorries and driven to site. The shop should be installed within three to five days. Punctuality and precision will minimise the closure period.

Deficiencies: Deficiencies will be rectified within the next few weeks, hopefully only small items.

Maintenance: A responsive 24 hour maintenance service should be available.

Location

While the traditional bakery is located on high streets or in a central position in the community to provide the population with fresh bread and cake, the recent development has been takeaway business which can now account for more than 50% of turnover.

Bread is a declining part of the business. So where are the new locations for the baker? Railway stations? Yes, but not every station - main line stations and terminuses are preferable.

People are generally in a rush, and you should not be fooled by numbers. You don't want to be where thousands rush by. Transit areas are no good. The better places are waiting and meeting areas where people must spend some time, waiting for people to arrive or waiting to catch the next train. This goes for airports and bus stations, too. Tube stations are difficult as there are restrictions due to fire-precautions.

It is worth looking into schools, universities and hospitals under the trust situation. These trusts are potential income; cafeterias need to be privatised to create income.

There are two special characteristics of all these new locations, railway stations, airports, bus stations and hospitals:

- It takes a long time from the first idea to final execution, with lots of papers to be filled in, endless meetings, decision making bodies whose personnel can often change, and unexpected delays. But once in business you find your location is good and turnover often much higher than on the high street.
- In traditional locations, you seem to fight endlessly over rent reviews. Here, you talk turnover related rent which in general means that you guarantee a minimum turnover and then pay something like 8 15%.

The range of products you are allowed to sell should be established from the very beginning. We have been in situations where suddenly no canned drinks, or hot snacks, or pizza or pies were allowed to be sold. These restrictions as well as opening hours and policies, likely centralisation or relocation should be taken into account. Your shopfitter can often advise and assist.

For an expanding bakery business, any location where people meet and spend time - museums, covered markets, tourist areas or mobile shops in open markets or in an industrial area - is interesting. In Germany, the shop-within-a-shop comprising butcher, baker and delicatessen is very successful.

Shops inside, or in front of supermarkets again are highly successful. With your fresh products, you add to the variety of goods on offer and free up the supermarket to reorganise its own bakery, which is often neither efficient nor innovative.

Cost

Shopfitting is similar to buying a car, it reflects your status and provides a frame of reference for your goods. As people want to buy not out of necessity but as an adventure, often in their free time, you should always be providing a little treat.

What kind of shop you opt for, and how elaborate the shopfitting, must depend on the neighbourhood. In an existing shop, it is easier to work out the investment - as a rule of thumb your level of investment into the new shopfittings is 10 to 12 times the weekly expected turnover of the shop.

Most shopfitters will assist in the financing of your shop and will spread the repayments over a period of six months up to a year, or even longer subject to your financial status.