

Modular Theme Park Attraction Space

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In traditional theatre venues there is a typical proscenium, thrust or arena configuration where the physical facility elements rarely, if ever, change. The shows come and go, and the same infrastructure supports many diverse and varied productions. Why has this paradigm not carried over into the Theme Park dark ride business model?

There will always be the “anchor” and “signature” attractions that define a Theme Park, but not all attractions should be considered with a twenty year life-span or as shows that virtually never change. With that in mind; wouldn't it make sense to design at least one space within a given Park for that inevitable change? Granted, the initial facility costs would be more, but if intelligently designed, future modification costs could be significantly reduced.

Theater space can be synonymous with attraction space; however in our scenario, the audience travels THROUGH the theater space. The concept of the immersive experience is typically divided into scenes, not unlike the stage performance, but, instead of act curtain hidden scene changes, in our world the scene changes occur by way of physical displacement where the audience actually “enters” the new scene. It is for want of segregation and division that a specific “ride path” best serves our purposes when it allows for selective visibility and intentional physical occlusions that separate sections into discrete scenes.

There are numerous options for efficient guest conveyances, from relatively easily reconfigurable wire guided systems to hard track individual, flume type water conveyances, and extremely efficient omni-mover type configurations. In a modularly designed facility, it would not necessarily require that the track be reconfigurable, however, having this capability could obviously greatly enhance show change-out. This facility, if intelligently designed, could still be extremely effective utilizing exactly the same ride path and updated sets, lighting and effects.

Virtually all attractions (dark rides) have similar technical requirements:

1. Physical Facility – The Building
2. Facility Power

3. Lighting
4. Audio
5. Special Effects
 - (a) Air
 - (b) Water
 - (c) CO2 / LN2
6. Show Control
7. Ride Control
8. Equipment Rooms

Designing a “shell” building that could be easily retrofitted with a variety of scenic elements could be an entertaining challenge in and of itself. Many dark ride installations do not have modular design, pits, wells or pools, extensive overhead rigging, catwalks, overbuilt utilities, movable walls and oversized access (roll up doors, etc.). These, however, are quite common in many well equipped motion picture stages. In these facilities, redesign of the space (typically on very short notice) is quite common. These facilities have evolved over time and while in many ways some of their practices would be overkill for a Theme Park installation; there are still a lot of lessons learned that we could draw a lot from. The idea of designing a space that could virtually accommodate ANY storytelling scenario is certainly a serious challenge. There would unquestionably have to be compromises in some areas; the practicality vs. dollars scale would have to prevail. There are, potentially, very substantial advantages to being able to offer up such a facility as a “mystery box” of sorts to be able to present a wide variety of experiential concepts within a short changeover time.

Beginning the dialog of designing a modular Theme Park attraction space has come of age. This is a subject that we should be investigating thoroughly and potentially offering up as a development project to the right customer. The potential for initiating a product that approaches a common Theme Park issue with a new thought process is something that I think is uniquely Thinkwell.