

The background of the slide is a close-up, slightly blurred image of a Build-A-Bear Workshop bear. The bear is light brown and has dark brown eyes. It is holding a small, brown, oval-shaped object in its mouth. To the left of the bear's head, there is a bouquet of dried flowers and greenery.

# HOW **BUILD-A-BEAR** CONNECTS WITH CUSTOMERS



# HOW **BUILD-A-BEAR** CONNECTS WITH CUSTOMERS

Connecting with customers sounds pretty easy, doesn't it? Offering a brighter smile, bringing a helpful attitude, and anticipating customers' needs are the human skills that most people think about first.

In today's always-on, omnichannel world, everything has to tie in — not just everyone. Customers expect all their retail details to be aligned and to 'connect' with them. This includes the store's appearance, design, layout, ease of finding products, staff support, ease of returns, integration of the physical and online components of the store, return policies, pricing accuracy, digital tools (in-store and on-line) and so much more. Dropping the ball in any of these areas frustrates customers while creating friction and contributing to lower operating margins for retailers.

Build-A-Bear Workshop has done a remarkable job of serving its customers — young and old alike. Now in its third-generation store design, this brand continues to connect. Read on to discover the principles they use which you can apply in your own store or business.





# THE CONNECTION STARTS EVEN BEFORE YOU STEP INSIDE THE STORE

From its debut in 1997, Build-a-Bear Workshop emphasized interaction, fun, and love. Now, almost twenty years later, several generations are familiar with the experience of helping make a new friend for themselves or as a gift for someone else. The stories born from those experiences get passed down to friends, family, and colleagues. Great stories are born from great experiences. Often, people crave a Build-A-Bear experience of their own based on the stories they hear from their friends.

You find a new (unstuffed) friend, then you decide how you want them to be (add sound, aroma, and add a wish), assemble them, outfit them, get a birth certificate and a 'house' (coveted cardboard box designed as a bear house), pay for it amidst lots of smiles and hugs and you're on your way.

The brand has introduced its third retail store version while maintaining the heritage of the experience. Keeping the same feelings in the experience as the ways of work change is nearly an impossible feat. Many others have tried and failed. Build-A-Bear has successfully adapted its experience. Now, it's smarter, more interactive, more digital, and it connects better with young and old alike.

# BUILD-A-BEAR EXPERTLY BLENDS HIGH-TECH AND HIGH-TOUCH

The new store design wasn't just conjured out of thin air. It was the result of a considered design process (stewarded by the retail design team at FRCH), one that included input from customers, store associates, and back-office specialists. There's a reason behind each element's location, every button, and the ceremonies that go into building a furry friend.





# BUILD-A-BEAR **EXPERTLY** BLENDS HIGH-TECH AND HIGH-TOUCH

- **MOVING THE FLUFFING STATION TO THE STORE'S CENTER (IT WAS AGAINST THE WALL IN PREVIOUS VERSIONS)**

Creates more curb appeal, improves traffic flow inside the store, and creates more room for engagement with clients.

- **ADDING TOUCH SCREENS RIGHT UP FRONT**

Gets people immediately engaged and gives gift-givers and gift-getters the opportunity to review more options before making their final selections. That means bigger smiles, fewer returns, and increased sales.

- **A MODULAR DESIGN AT THE BACK OF THE STORE**

Provides more room for parties—without disrupting regular customer traffic. Parties represent a new kind of experience and a new revenue stream (every kid at the party gets a bear).



# KID'S PERSPECTIVE

In the new store design, Build-A-Bear has kid-sized the displays, shelves, and other elements in the store. The core experience remains fully intact. The biggest change makes the creation process more prominent, beginning with a new inspiration encounter where guests can imagine all the options before they start creating. Research showed that this reduced anxiety (about not getting the best bear possible) and led to more successful completions (product sales). Kids love meeting and bonding with a new furry friend. Both parents and kids appreciate the tactile experience that allows them to “step away from the screen”.

Giving kids free access to products and a clearer view of options (while leaving their parents in charge) gives feelings of freedom and opportunity. Because the steps are laid out sequentially, kids naturally discover each next step and traffic flows are optimized.





# GIFT GIVER'S PERSPECTIVE

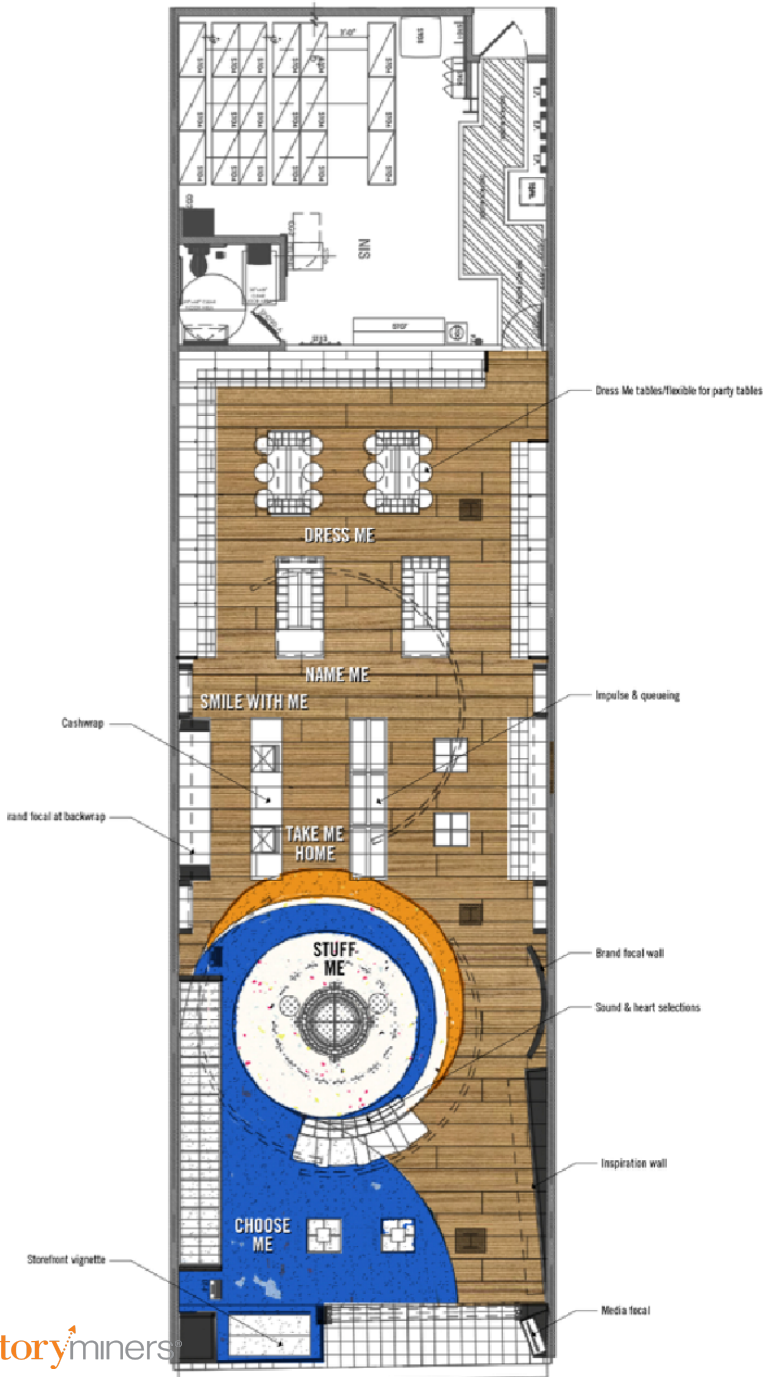
Love, Friendship, And Fun Are At The Heart Of The Experience.

The experience at Build-A-Bear Workshop is more memorable than the cuddly new friend you leave the store with. Even years after a bear is created, the gift giver and the gift receiver can remember details of the building experience. That's what matters and what adds the most value to the transaction. No other teddy bear or plush toy manufacturer or brand ever comes close!

While the gift receiver gets most of the attention as they make their own bear, the gift giver isn't left out of the experience. There are multiple ways for them to be involved, such as:

- **RECORDING THEIR VOICE ONTO THE EMBEDDED SOUND DEVICE**
- **SELECTING CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES**
- **HELPING MAKE THE MANY DESIGN DECISIONS**
- **PAYING FOR THE NEW FRIEND ;-)**

More than process mechanics, gift givers get the pleasure of watching their children, grandchildren, or dates make decisions, discoveries – and memories. These indelible shared experiences become part of who they become and will be remembered for years into the future.



# BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE

## Build-A-Bear Is The Tom Sawyer Of Retail

In Mark Twain's 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer', (1876) Tom lives with his Aunt Polly and his half-brother Sid. He skips school to go swimming one day and has to whitewash the fence the next as punishment. Tom expertly negotiates payment from his friends for the 'privilege' of doing the painting work.

Similarly, Build-A-Bear turns the labor part of the bear-building equation to its advantage. Instead of keeping ready-made (space-absorbing and expensive to ship) versions of its bears in multiple configurations ready on the shelves, it puts the assembly plant at the point of sale. Because kids help make their own bears (don't worry, no child labor laws are broken ;-)) there's not much ready made inventory to carry, space requirements are smaller (think less rent), and unsold merchandise never has to go on sale (at a loss). Everything is current and perfectly suited to each customer. Costs are minimized. Mass customization wins.

The good design doesn't end with the store's architecture. It continues through operations. Build-A-Bear is smart for extending its product line to include branded characters. This decision has injected new life into the brand, extended merchandising opportunities, and brought in older buyers.





# TAKE-AWAY'S + HOW-TO'S

## DON'T

### GRAM EVERY SQUARE FOOT OF WALL SPACE WITH MORE STUFF TO SELL.

BAB splits the space between the experience of discovery, building and bonding with selling

### PUT WHAT YOU WANT TO SELL MOST IN THE CENTER.

BAB saves that for what's most important to the experience and what attracts the most attention. Not surprisingly, everyone ends up wanting the experience which, of course, requires a purchase.

### SUFFOCATE THE EXPERIENCE.

BAB emphasizes dialog, questions, imagination, and love in its store experience. While BAB allows operational concerns to influence the design, it doesn't ever let them control the design (except for safety concerns).

# TAKE-AWAY'S + HOW-TO'S

## DO

### **FOCUS ON YOUR CUSTOMERS—FROM SHORTEST TO TALLEST.**

BAB puts key elements at kid level giving children the opportunity to 'lead' in the store. Giving kids clues about what's next makes them feel 'in control'.

### **COMMUNICATE WITH ALL FIVE SENSES.**

BAB designs for everything (except taste), although some of their smallest guests sometimes can't resist trying to take a bite of a bear.

### **MAKE SURE NO TWO EXPERIENCES ARE IDENTICAL.**

BAB's heart ceremony (when the gift receiver makes a wish on a small heart as its placed into their bear) varies from guest to guest. People waiting in line for their turn don't get the last person's recycled dialog. They get their own, unique experience.

### **SEPARATE IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION INITIATIVES.**

BAB knows when to make things work a little better (improvements) and when to introduce something altogether different (innovation). It's smart enough to use different processes, insights, and design techniques for each.

### **KEEP THE EXPERIENCE CONSISTENT.**

BAB regularly makes changes to improve the guest experience and the company's operations. However, it maintains the universal appeal of its experience by focusing on fun, friendship and family worldwide.





# CONTACT US

*Offices in Atlanta, Georgia, works globally*



+01 404.229.5809



[www.Storyminers.com](http://www.Storyminers.com)



[@storyminers](https://twitter.com/storyminers)



[/company/storyminers](https://www.linkedin.com/company/storyminers)



[/storyminers/](https://www.facebook.com/storyminers/)



[info@storyminers.com](mailto:info@storyminers.com)

*StoryMiners is not associated with Build-A-Bear Workshop or FRCH, but we are big fans of both!  
Images courtesy of Intl St. Clair, FRCH, and Build-A-Bear Workshop.*