

# Building BLOCKS

## The Seven Secrets of Successful Restaurant Construction

### Secret #4: A Proactive Approach

by John Klakamp

Recently one of our projects won a prestigious RAMMY award. As happy as I was that an Encore project was recognized, I can honestly say I was even happier for my client's success—which got me thinking about another secret for a successful restaurant project: exceptional service.

Nothing will influence your project's success more than the quality of construction services. So why is this perceived as a necessary evil rather than an asset? The answer lies in the shortcomings of the traditional construction process.

#### The Traditional Method – Reactive in Nature

In the traditional building approach, the owner first hires an architect. Plans are drawn up then sent out to contractors for bid. At this point, design is pretty much complete.

There are several flaws in this process. First, while a \$500K to \$2M restaurant is very complex, often the owner is somewhat inexperienced, going through this process for just the first or second time. Furthermore, independent restaurateurs generally do not have a dedicated construction department providing valuable pre-construction services. While competitive bids would seem to ensure the lowest cost, the reality is they force contractors to focus more on being the lowest bidder and less on

reviewing or recommending what is best for your project.

Finally, because this process is reactive in nature, it brings the contractor in far too late. Since design is virtually complete before the contractor has had an opportunity to assess the existing building and systems, problems crop up during the construction phase, where they cost more and take longer to resolve.

#### Construction Services – A Closer Look

Far more than just project management and trades performed during actual construction, construction services range from evaluating existing conditions and flagging potential concerns to working with the architect to select the best design solutions at the stage where they cost the least money.

To reap the greatest benefit of construction services, you should begin as early as possible—ideally during the pre-lease stage. This allows time to analyze the landlord's work letter from a contractor's viewpoint so you can negotiate any defects for a more favorable lease. But even if you're past the pre-lease stage, you can still reap many benefits at the pre-design phase. Concept review, risk assessment, conceptual budgeting and scheduling activities at this point contribute to an improved value design that will minimize change orders and ensure "constructability" of the actual design.

#### Integrated Project Delivery – Proactive Teamwork

With nearly 30 years of restaurant building experience, I've worked for both owners and contractors. This unique perspective has taught me a better, more proactive, way to achieve the desired results.

Integrated project delivery occurs when an owner forms a team that includes an architect and contractor, the project is then designed to meet all of the owner's requirements including the budget. Essentially, you are bringing a contractor in to serve as your "construction department" and to provide vital pre-lease and pre-design services. This information is then used to accomplish the predetermined and stated goals for the project.

Integrated project delivery offers owners a number of benefits, including:

- Eliminating the adversarial nature between owner/architect and contractor that inherently exists with competitive bidding
- Ensuring the entire team is working to deliver the owner's vision while achieving the established budget and schedule
- Negotiating a better lease agreement
- Reducing or eliminating costly change orders
- Delivering a smooth building process
- Improving the design



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#### Construction Services – The Missing Link

I have met with literally hundreds of restaurant owners and heard almost exactly the same story time after time of past building heartaches. In virtually every case there was a gap between what the architect designed and what the contractor built. This missing link is what inevitably leads to budget overruns and schedule delays and, in the most extreme cases, can jeopardize the entire project.

Because no matter which contractor you choose, it's only by combining pre-lease and pre-design construction services at the earliest stage with exceptional client service that you can successfully achieve your desired results.



*John Klakamp has over 30 years experience in restaurant construction and is owner of Annapolis, Md.-based Encore Construction ([www.encoreconstruction.net](http://www.encoreconstruction.net)), a firm that specializes in providing pre-construction, construction and project management services to the restaurant industry.*

*Encore, Booth 823, is introducing AdvantEdge, a new comprehensive construction services package, at the upcoming Mid-Atlantic Food, Beverage & Lodging EXPO.*