

Making fun

ASI always has designs on its next FEC

AMUSEMENT Services International is known to many as a leading distributor in the Middle East and beyond, but it also boasts a team dedicated to designing entire leisure projects from the ground up.

ASI Design Solutions was conceived in 2002 after the company, having mainly concentrated on supplying attractions with equipment, recognised a gap in the marketplace.

Jenny Impens, business development manager, and interior designer Sehrish Fatima shed some light on their creative mission. "We believe it's the design or the form of a centre that dictates the experience, draws people in and thus allows the equipment within it to make the money," explained Impens.

"In-depth knowledge of the function of fixtures and furniture is paramount to realising the design for any facility, leisure or otherwise. I don't want to sound disrespectful to general architectural design companies who sometimes indulge in design of leisure facilities, but many of these firms lack thorough knowledge of our industry and the equipment within it, which is irregular in many ways and comes in different sizes, heights and dynamic actions. This apart, design firms also need to have sound understanding of the operational nuances of such equipment before they can lay out a facility and come up with a design scheme for the same."

Sehrish Fatima explained that designing leisure facilities is indeed a specialised function.

"We are in a unique industry where a lot of money is spent on conceptualising a design and executing the project, going through the fit out phase, bringing in the equipment, hiring staff, pre-opening the project, etc. You start earning revenue only after you open doors to customers. Six months post opening, investors will then start realising the weakness in their design that looked so wonderful on paper as a concept, the fit out and choice of equipment. That's when reality bites. By this point an investor would have certainly lost a significant amount of their investment."

Such failures, said Fatima, are subjects that she and her design solutions colleagues are tasked to evaluate from time to time. "The factors that lead to such failure were mostly design and planning related, much more than factors relating to operations of the facility. Overly themed, non-existent sight lines, equipment choice unsuitable for the project demographic, no planning for off peak and peak season operational demands, no allowance in the design for attractions to evolve - the factors are many-fold.

"Some of these projects are, for example, located in the third floor of an upmarket mall. The designer in these cases simply did not understand the relationship between the dynamic forces of an attraction and the civil structure of the mall. Load considerations, vibrations, noise, were all factors that had to be addressed. When the project failed, it was simply blamed on the industry or the equipment. We felt strongly about this."

This is why ASI Design Solutions was created. Having a team of professionals who understand design, equipment and its dynamics, as well as its operation and who can then integrate this knowledge into each



Funcity, Pakistan



Jumble, UAE

stage of the design, fit out and operation, gives each new project a far greater chance of success. The team at Design Solutions comprises business analysts, architects, interior designers, graphic designers, 3D visualisers, project managers and operations experts working out of the company's headquarters in Dubai.

"We have confidence in the approach that we take to our projects, as pretty much all of the them we've been involved with have proven to be very successful and profitable," said Impens. "This then creates a template and fosters trust with a client."

Impens detailed a project she and her team undertook for a new investor in Pakistan five years ago. "We held their hand from initial concept to project opening and beyond. It was a tremendous success."

Buoyed by this success, the owners of the location, Fun City, then had the confidence to open four more and employed ASI's services further for these new projects.

The success of Fun City led other investors in Pakistan to take notice of the opportunities the industry offered. "We have finished another exciting project for a new investor in Karachi called Wonderland, a 60,000sq. ft indoor theme park within a mall and are working on four more large projects in Pakistan. Exemplary projects lead to market growth and that is the vision for ourselves and the amusement industry," said Impens.

Design Solutions has several other clients all across the Middle East, south Asia and eastern Europe for which they have created iconic FEC brands and realised multiple locations. "So the majority of design jobs we are working on today is repeat business from existing clients. This is a great endorsement of the services we have offered our clientele," said Fatima.

The team has always been busy and 2017 was no exception. One of the highlights was a unique project for UAE operating giant Landmark Leisure, called Jumble - an interactive urban maze combining adventure and escape room-type activities. This year-long project for Design Solutions opened its doors to positive reviews in December.

Jumble was a first of its kind and complex concept that involved 100 interconnected rooms, each one being uniquely themed. "Jumble was a collaborative effort with the operations team at Landmark who challenged our design skills with a number of maze ideations. It's a must visit project," said Impens.

With a bulging order book for 2018 and beyond, the team is now working on new projects in Kuwait, UAE, Iraq, India, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. All of these endeavours share a common theme in their designs - it's not just about look and feel - but being able to integrate the many parameters that influence the success of an operation and enhancing the customer experience.

The team at ASI Design Solutions surely knows how to achieve this and more.



Jenny Impens, business development manager

Sehrish Fatima, interior designer