

STRATEGY AND INNOVATION CENTERS

WHERE THE VISIONARY
MEETS THE PRESENT



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INNOVATION NEEDS A SPACE TO THRIVE

The word “innovation” has taken on a new level of ubiquity. Every forward-thinking company wants it, but do they have a definition of what it is, and what’s required for it to thrive?

Innovation speaks to keeping pace with ever-changing market needs, wants and desires. Fail to innovate, and your competitor will fill the void. In this landscape, a strong vision for the future is a must. But that vision is just half the story; innovation lies in an organization’s ability to apply its most creative thoughts about tomorrow and beyond to the here and now.

Research shows that an innovation-driven culture is inherently fluid and self-propagating, and can be cultivated quickly when it has a space in which to get established. Leading brands are taking note, and building dedicated venues – call them innovation centers, strategy centers, tech Incubators, innovation labs, maker spaces, the list goes on – which use physical space and digital tools to foster the collaboration, experimentation and storytelling they need to keep ahead of the proverbial curve.

AN INNOVATION CENTER IS A PLACE WHERE CONCEPTS FOR THE FUTURE AND THE REALITIES OF THE PRESENT ARE KNIT TOGETHER WITH TECHNOLOGY, TO BRING BOLD NEW IDEAS TO LIFE.

INNOVATION NEEDS A SPACE TO THRIVE

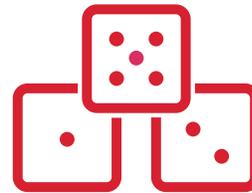
These interactive spaces offer brands a range of valuable benefits:



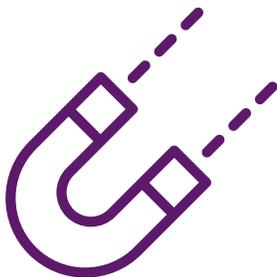
Accelerate
the speed of
innovation



Provide a fresh
source of ideas



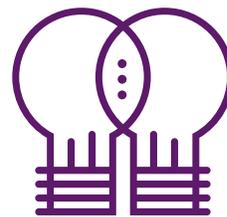
Enhance risk-
taking ability



Attract talent



Drive employee
engagement



Build a culture
of innovation

INNOVATION CENTERS: BY THE NUMBERS



The main focus of Innovation Centers is to explore technology and also to humanize the evolving digital customer.

65%

focus on gaining access and exposure to latest technologies.

35%

focus on deeper understanding of customer needs.

Other areas of focus include showcasing disruptive technology and exploring the digital customer's needs, expectations and behaviors.

(Source: The Innovating Game, 2015 report by Capgemini Consulting and Altimeter)

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

Strategy and Innovation Centers can be inviting environments that inspire new brand thinking, or serve as a way to showcase the evolving relationship between emerging technology and your customer's needs. Determine and prioritize your program's goals and strategies by understanding and anticipating the needs of stakeholders, primary users and the target audience. Sketch out the program's blueprint by building from their perspective, as these points create the framework for the entire experience, from programming to messaging to space design.

PRO-TIP:

“How you engage with the target audience must ladder up to the goals you set for the program. At the end of the day, it's important to determine how and what you want to communicate to the audience. An easy way to do this is to simply put yourself in their shoes and figure out what you want them to think, feel or do.”



AUDREY TANG,
ACCOUNT DIRECTOR

For many innovation centers, the primary objective is to accelerate or showcase digital innovation by **translating insights into actionable strategies, rethinking the customer experience, improving operational efficiency** and **testing new business models** through the use of technology.

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

Other common goals of innovation centers:

Build brand and corporate reputation

Showcase innovation and beta test new technology

Illustrate a better/more in-depth audience-centric brand and product story in an engaging and immersive environment

Drive business growth and business development

Create a collaboration space for partners and employees



HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL
AND SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM,
**PLAN AND BUILD YOUR PROGRAM
FOR GROWTH AND FLEXIBILITY.**
IT'S OKAY TO NOT GET IT RIGHT THE
FIRST TIME – EVALUATE, IMPROVE
AND LEARN FROM STAKEHOLDERS
AND TARGET AUDIENCE FEEDBACK.

THE ROAD TO CREATION

1 Identify key players: Ensure that all parties understand what is expected of them at the very start of development. The more clarity, the better. Define each team members' roles and responsibilities, including all fabricators, suppliers and vendors.

2 Identify the space: Companies believe location is the holy grail of innovation. Taking your brand's goals into account, determine the ideal use of space. You'll want to consider the space's primary users and figure out what you want to provide them.



JOHN GILSON,
COO

PRO-TIP:

“ Develop a floor plan immediately, as most conversations aren't rooted in reality until all parties are all looking at something (no matter how preliminary) to begin making decisions. Keep square footage in mind, and always ask what the space comes with, where all the access points are, and what can and cannot be altered in the space.”

3 Budget & Timing: Budget drives everything, as there are many ways to use technology in the space in design, fabrication and beyond. Also, be sure to pad your timeline for permitting, inspections and any unforeseen delays. There's never as much time or money as there first appears, so set expectations from the start.

CRAFTING YOUR NARRATIVE

1 Know Your Audiences: Crafting your center’s story should start by digging into serious audience research to ensure that you’re accounting for every type of guest that will walk through the space. Typically, these spaces play host to investors, VIPs, technologists and developers, media and partners, as well as employees—resulting in the need for dynamic, flexible spaces.

2 Collaborate with Stakeholders on a Content Strategy: Experiential content can come to life in a myriad of ways inside an innovation center. You’ll see everything from signage to digital screens, to hosted presentations and more. It’s hard to overstate how important it is to tie it all together with a content strategy—and to communicate that content strategy effectively. Start by defining your story and you’ll be on your way to building a company and a culture capable of driving innovation.

PRO-TIP:

“Experiences like these have lots of stakeholders and coordinating messaging requirements across disparate groups that can be a challenge. Hold listening sessions in which you pitch your narrative and gather feedback from everyone – then use that feedback to make sure your narrative addresses their needs.”



MIKE STANDISH,
VP, CREATIVE STRATEGY

3 Communicate Before, During and After a Visit: It’s easy to forget that a guest’s visit starts well before they step through the front door, and extends well after they leave. Make sure your narrative accounts for pre- and post-visit communications, to help prepare your guests for the best experience possible and to make them more likely to return.

4 Build a Flexible Narrative and Keep It Updated: Innovation Centers are long-term investments. Even though your center is a physical structure, it’s also a living, breathing space, which is filled by many different people. Crafting your narrative so it reflects current thinking at launch is only the first step. It’s critical to check in, especially after major brand milestones, to see if your story needs to evolve.

DESIGN FOR COLLABORATION

Determine what design elements would be helpful for the target audience to be exposed to more ideas, and how physical space can activate creative thinking. Give a space purpose, whether you want people to walk away feeling inspired, or want them to brainstorm in the space. Every project is going to be different, but there's something to be said about knowing the ultimate goal, understanding your audience and styling appropriately.

Things to Consider:

The visitor's journey: Like all good stories, innovation centers have a beginning, middle and an end. Determine the path of the visitor early on, as it will inform how you design the space at each step.

Use of space: Whether you're creating spaces for storytelling or for story creating, be aware of the space given and go through several rounds to build an effective layout. Create room for private meeting spaces, a formal conference room or an informal lounge setup.

Flexibility: White boards, tacking surfaces, movable furniture, modularity and spaces created specifically for ideas to unfold are key to a flexible environment. Elements such as these that expand and are easily adapted have the ability to be converted into different combinations for a program's overall narrative. With environments like these, the space can be interchangeable and interpreted for many purposes. People recognize versatility as an attribute that is needed by companies looking to transform, expand, iterate and change.

DESIGN FOR COLLABORATION

Weaving in technology seamlessly: New technologies, especially digital and data-based programs, are powerful tools. Unlike ever before, companies are leveraging tech to highlight valuable insights and enact change. When outfitting a space with interactive tech, figure out how the technology can ladder up to the program's goals, what makes sense for the space and make sure that every piece has a purpose. Collaboration tools such as touchscreen virtual workspaces, tablets and digital displays, 3D printers and monitors with the versatility to swivel between portrait and landscape for presenter mode or demonstrations are just a few accessible tech elements that can foster a culture of creative thinking and action.

PRO-TIP:

“**Modularity creates space for ideas to happen. Like brainstorming, you can make connections to different corners of the environment. It's important to prime the space in order to create a mood of inspiration, and flexible elements make that possible.**”



AARON PITTS,
VP, CREATIVE & DESIGN



THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Technology Fine-tuning: Oftentimes, these types of projects pull various technology components from several different partners. The overall integration of these technologies and how they work seamlessly together can take extra time on-site. Ensure that there is sufficient power and strong Internet connection for media needs, especially during an event. Pre-planning can address some of this, but there's no substitute for having everyone on-site physically seeing the space come to life and being able to make necessary adjustments—on the fly.

Space design and experience floor: For media visiting the strategy center, the experience with your brand begins when they receive an invitation to the center and the moment they arrive at the location. It's important to set expectations for a successful experience. What should they be expecting to see at the center? Logistically, is there reserved parking? Will a host be meeting them a reception because the strategy center has restricted access? Is there sufficient power and Internet for their laptops or video equipment?

Styling: You can have the greatest technology and content on the market, but if the space doesn't align with the overall brand or isn't furnished in a way that is welcoming and functional for its guests, you may miss the mark. This is not an area to skimp on, or an expertise that can be faked, so be sure to pay for professional stylists if you don't have the capability to do it yourself.

PRO-TIP:

“*At Publicis Experiences, we're dedicated to making smart styling choices to deliver experiences that fully immerse attendees in a brand's story. Styling requires a keen eye for design, attention to detail and a broad perspective in order to create an elevated experience. **When styling, be deliberate in your choices because refined, purposeful design makes the biggest impact in a space.***”



LULÚ ALMAZÁN,
SENIOR ART DIRECTOR

THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Rehearsals: Innovation Centers don't run themselves. The person/people that operate them need time in the live space to rehearse demos, familiarize themselves with the technology, and understand all center operating procedures.

Measurement: If possible, create a place for users to reference and evaluate their experience with survey integration. Feedback from users is the most valuable feedback of all, and receiving it straight from the user's mouth is the most effective way to process and improve upon it.

Lastly, it's important to know that the job isn't done the day the Innovation Center opens. Whether the brand manages the center or utilizes an agency to do so, there should be clarity around ongoing maintenance, what type of warranties are in place, a trouble-shooting guide to reference, and expectations set around future center updates.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Build your team(s) wisely

- Hire an operations team that will manage day-to-day activities including scheduling, hosting, logistics & catering, reporting and maintenance.
- Form a strategic team of people who will support the program from a strategic planning perspective for business objectives, branding, technology, innovation and messaging.
- Reach out to experts and assemble an advisory board comprising of representatives from key stakeholder groups that you can provide high-level counsel.

Engage your stakeholders early

Engage your stakeholders early in the planning process and regularly. Show how you have incorporated their POVs and feedback into the development of the experience. Ensure that the strategy center is supporting their objectives too.

Measure and evaluate the program often

Set success metrics for your innovation center based on the program goals, and review these monthly and quarterly. Depending on the goals, this could be qualitative feedback from attendees and stakeholders or a reporting dashboard that is integrated into the company's sales tools.

Market the program thoroughly

It's critical to market the Innovation Center to all of your audiences, internally and externally. Whatever the medium, information should be available to introduce executives, new employees, customers, partners and media to innovation centers. Ensure that they're aware of the program's success and how it is contributing to the bottom line.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

PRO-TIP:

“Share feedback with your stakeholders and leverage any insights that come out of it for future planning. Innovation Centers are living spaces that should be flexible and grow with the company over time, so it’s important to consistently improve the experience based on new learnings and insights you can glean from the program’s metrics.”



LINDSAY ROWE,
VP, CLIENT ENGAGEMENT
& STRATEGY

BRANDS DOING IT BEST

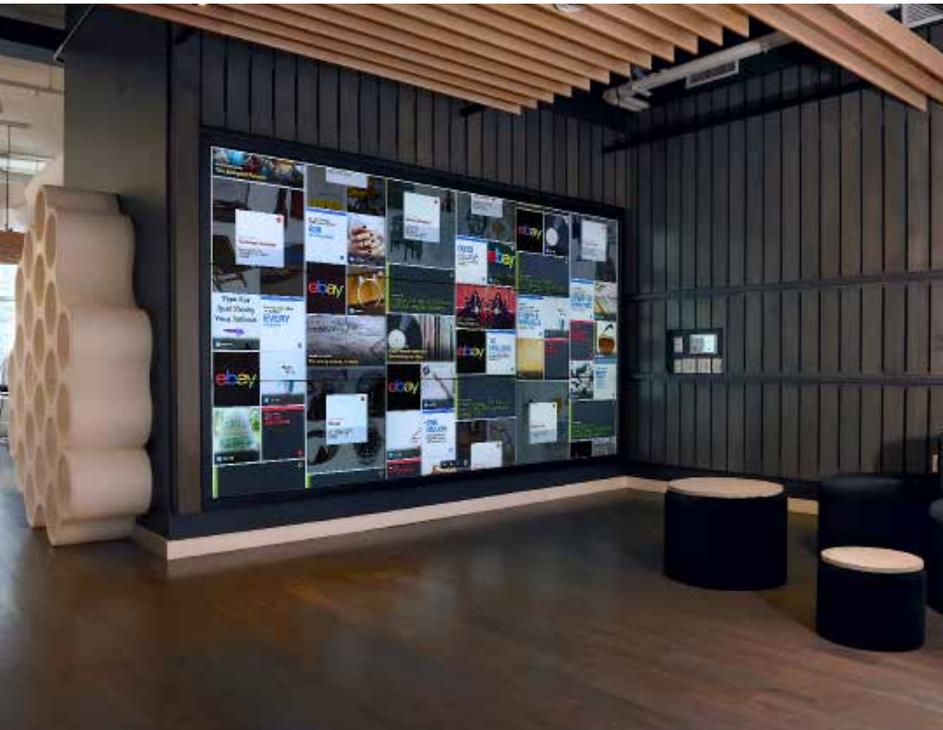
Coupons.com: Commerce Innovation Center



- Since Coupons.com was founded in 1998, it has led digital innovation in promotions, disrupting the coupon and promotions industry.
- To showcase its technology to an audience of investors, retailers and media, the company launched the Coupons.com Commerce Innovation Center to help them better understand how the technology can benefit their business.
- The space is an immersive environment that uses projection-mapping and immersive real-world vignettes to make digital-first promotions a tangible reality. The 1,700 square foot innovation center is on their San Jose campus and features a 10-15 minute digital experience, which guides attendees through the brand's history and current network of consumers, brands and retailers. From there, attendees experience a fully functional grocery store and specialty store setting where they can test the products via live demo. The tour concludes with a testimonial wall that showcases Coupons.com current successful partnerships and a collaborative workspace.

BRANDS DOING IT BEST

eBay: NYC Studio Space



- The eBay NYC studio is a radically versatile space for collaboration, meetings and events – packed with high-tech tools and relevant digital content.
- The crown jewel in the space is a massive interactive touchscreen wall that greets visitors with branded, browsable content as they enter. Customization is key in this space, because eBay needed a multifunctional space that could host everything from daytime workshops to high-profile events. Using modular furnishings, movable walls and customizable digital canvases, the space is able to transform and adapt to any use.
- The thoughtful floor plan supports individual and small-group focus time, while remaining open and flexible.

BRANDS DOING IT BEST

PayPal: Commerce Innovation Showcase



- PayPal's New York and San Jose campuses are home to immersive, simulated shopping experiences that bring PayPal's vision for seamless, connected commerce to life through contextualized situations.
- Customers, employees, media and prospective partners are walked through six retail vignettes demonstrating PayPal's payment solutions across multiple scenarios and devices. Custom touchscreens in each vignette simulate the experience of browsing, shopping and paying with PayPal products – effectively walking attendees through a day in the life of a consumer.
- The showcase is continuously updated with new demos to reflect how PayPal's technology has evolved.

BRANDS DOING IT BEST

UNICEF: Innovation Labs

- Innovation is vital to the state of the world's children. The challenges our children face today have never been larger or more pressing, from urbanization, climate change, lack of employment opportunities, broken education systems, increased disparities and digital divides. However, UNICEF is working on a new infrastructure with the potential to address these challenges.
- With multiple innovation labs in countries around the world, UNICEF is pushing the boundaries of what's possible and creating the future they want. Through collaboration, exploration and an open approach to innovate for equity, UNICEF has already brought innovations in mobile money to Kenya, birth registration in Nigeria and new types of learning and teaching in Argentina.
- The innovation lab in San Francisco integrates technology, design thinking and partnerships with the private sector and academia to create sustainable solutions to the most pressing challenges facing children and youth. With this network, they're able to facilitate best-in-class thinking, practices and application necessary to enable and expedite systemic, sustainable change.
- Source: [UNICEF](#)

Visa: Visa Labs

- Visa's innovation center, dubbed "Visa Labs," is the company's dedicated space for collaboration, recruiting, rapid prototyping, and showcase for Visa's vision for the future. The 112,000 square foot lab in San Francisco caters to employees, financial institutions, merchants, start-ups and technology partners in search of the next big thing in payments.
- They've created an environment designed to foster interaction, with 20-30 workspaces, an incubator outfitted with the latest technology for research scientists and developers, a multimedia auditorium for presentations, and more.
- Since opening, Visa has created several new products such as Visa Checkout—a simpler way for consumer to pay online, and Visa Token Service—a digital identifier that replaces the need to provide sensitive account information for a more secure payment process.
- Source – usa.visa.com

CONTACT US

LINDSAY ROWE

VP, CLIENT ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGY

O. 646-500-7644 M. 917-935-2524

LINDSAY.ROWE@PUBLICISXP.COM

WWW.PUBLICISXP.COM



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