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citizenM hotels design study



SUBMITTED BY
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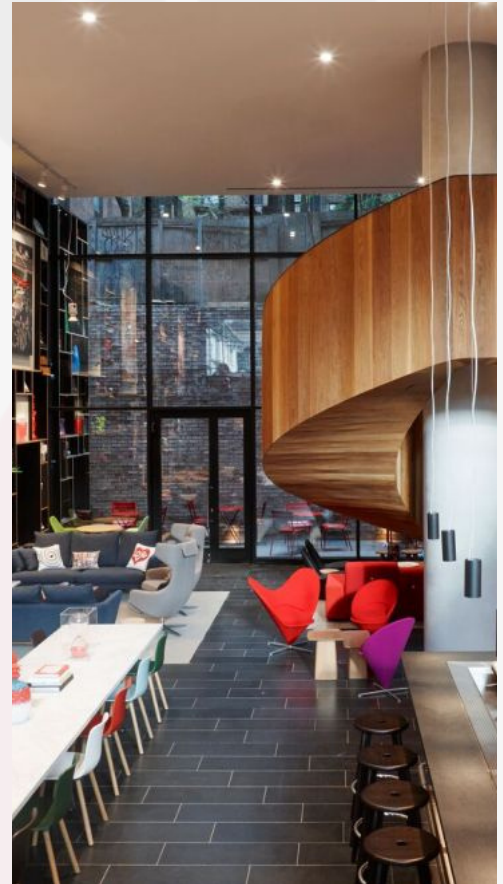
Introduction

Context

Organizations most frequently consider design on a **functional level**, i.e., the aesthetics, usability, functionality, and accessibility of a design with the user as key beneficiary in mind.

However especially in service design, elevating design to a **process level** supports the operators of that design to deliver quality services (c.f. Perks et al., 2005).

citizenM has disrupted the hospitality industry with a new understanding of the customer journey and created if you will a **desire path** to traditional hospitality processes and flows with not only the user but also the design operator in mind, i.e., citizenM ambassadors (=hotel personnel). For example, citizenM revolutionized the entire check-in experience eliminating queuing and formalized processes through mobile check-in and their kiosks.



hotels

Service Blueprint

The service blueprint (figure 1) shows the user journey after their booking until departure.

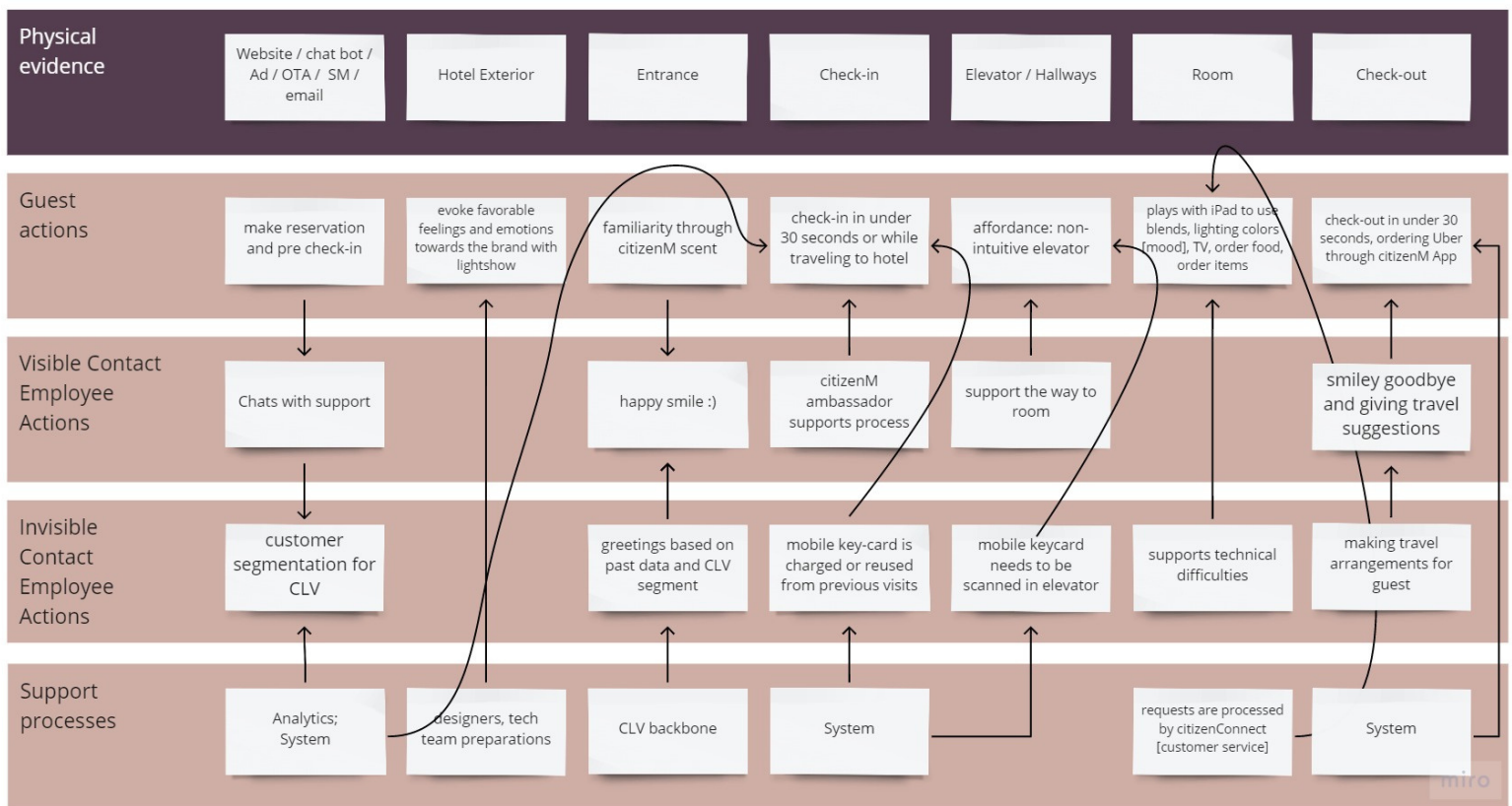


Figure 1 - Service Blueprint for citizenM

Design at citizenM

1) Functional Design: Norman's three levels of design

While all hotels sell a night of sleep, citizenM caters to so-called mobile citizens who want affordable luxury, convenience, and excellent service. The product, i.e., a night of sleep, is designed with the core user in mind.

Following Norman's (2007) three levels of design, on a **visceral level**, entering any citizenM hotel around the world creates familiarity through re-occurring design elements, such as lamps, colors and the citizenM scent, which in turn ensures product consistency and reliability for guests and leads to loyalty.

On a **behavioral level**, incorporation of technology via the citizenM app into design makes checking-in and out, ordering food, opening and closing blinds, turning on and off lights a matter of seconds and even allows for customization of colors based on mood in each of the rooms via the room's iPad.

However, not all parts of citizenM's design are user-friendly and easy to understand.

Following Norman's (2013) concept of **natural affordances**, citizenM elevators require guests to scan their key card in the elevator, which I observed during my shift to lead to confusions for guests. Observing user's general behavior could lead to new design ideas to re-think the elevator design and avoid the need for labelling (Figure 2).

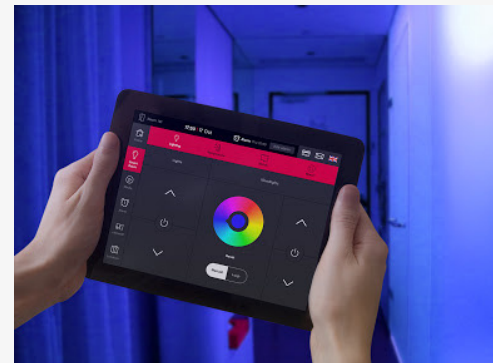


Figure 2 - natural affordances, citizenM elevator

reflective level

Consumer needs evolve over time once basic needs are fulfilled (Maslow, 1943). Human beings strive for **achievement to earn societal respect and status** (ibid.). Further, going on a leisure trip is no longer just about gaining real-time utility, but about **gaining remembered utility**, which can be consumed by our future remembering-self (Kahneman, 2010).

Social media combines these two concepts by allowing our future remembering-selves to consume remembered utility through photos, and by sharing our experiences with others to convey social status. Thus, conveying social status is no longer restricted to material possessions, but can also be displayed through experience.

citizenM successfully leverages this concept by offering guest's "instagramable" memories with their king-size beds with glorious city views appealing to guest's self-esteem (see Figure 3). This not only leads to guest's satisfaction beyond the mere product, but also allows to spread the product through electronic word of mouth through Instagram.



Figure 3 - "instagramable" shots for the remembering-self and for status conveyance

Design at citizenM

2) PROCESS DESIGN

According to de Keyser et al. (2020), service user experiences comprises three building blocks, namely touchpoints (human, digital, physical), context (e.g., mood, cultural differences), and qualities (e.g., degree of involvement), which are all highly situational dependent.

Thus, service is not standardizable, but still needs to deliver to the same standard, i.e., meet and exceed guest's expectations, each and every time. Hence, service user experience needs to be supported by both invisible contact employee actions and support processes (see Service Blueprint Figure 1; and Figure 4).

Elevating design to a strategic level, where it shapes organizational processes and breaks down organizational siloes is key to deliver quality service continuously (see Perks et al., 2005).

At citizenM I observed the positive effect of breaking down siloes on process design, for example adjusting hiring and training processes with the aim to serve the guest best possibly. However, marketing and operations still dominate on a strategic level at citizenM.



Figure 4 - citizenM ambassadors supporting guests to check-in

Limitations

Inclusive design?

While at first glance citizenM's design seems inclusive, i.e., accessible entrance, low windowsills etc., looking at the details, inclusivity was not fully incorporated into the design process. Figure 4 shows a kiosk that was retrospectively added to allow people in wheelchairs or kids to check-in.

Emotional durable design?

Moreover, citizenM's design does not follow Jonathan Chapman's (2005) idea of emotional durability. The refurbishment team at citizenM ensures that inventory in all hotels worldwide is easily repairable, but also replaceable through standardization for the sake of cost efficiency. So rather than "celebrating the process of ageing" design is implemented to be worn out to satisfy consumer's unstable desires (c.f. Chapman, 2009). This can only be changed through using more sustainable and durable materials that create attachment and consciousness for the product (ibid.).



Figure 5 - vainly searching for truly inclusive design

Conclusion

Thus, the example of citizenM shows successful design integration not just on a functional, but also on a process level. However, this mainly applies to citizenM's main target segment, mostly disregarding inclusivity and sustainability in the design stage. This shows the prevalence of marketing over design in the organization.

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