



Joseph's

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Joseph's

You aren't going to find any technicolor dreamcoats just yet but for shoes, jewellery, accessories, even a DIY crocheted beanie hat, you might want to add Joseph's to your shopping list. For the past year a new shop just off the main pedestrian precinct in Nuremberg has been offering a glimpse into the future, not only of shopping but of services in general. From the outside it looks like an up-market tech store with big windows, trendy logo and the intriguing label 'Josephs' – Service Factory'. Walk down the few steps and you are in a modern cafe with the usual tempting array of pastries, the comforting hissing of coffee machinery and the rich aroma of Mr. Bleck's (a sort of Nuremberg Starbucks) finest blend wafting through the air. Plus there's a rather different kind of shop attached.

The idea behind Josephs' is to bring the man and woman in the street up to the innovation frontier, to show them some of the new technologies which might shape their service experience and give them a chance to play around with them. It's part of a wave of activities which involve 'co-creation'; rather than simply consume users are invited to chip in their ideas, their feedback and even to get stuck in and create something of their very own. 'Tech-shops', 'Fab-Labs' and other versions have been springing up all round the world offering a space where people can use new design and manufacturing technologies like 3-D printing to create products of their own. Josephs' takes this a step further, bringing the whole idea of services into the mix and essentially placing a prototyping laboratory in the high street.

It's the product of a partnership between the nearby Fraunhofer Institute IIS and the University of Nurnberg-Erlangen. (The IIS has a pretty good track record in the world of bringing new technologies into our daily lives; amongst many other innovations they invented the mp3 algorithms which underpinned the digital music revolution). Their interest lies in finding different ways to bring their new technological tools to the attention of a wider public, not just to showcase their 'gee whiz!' aspects but in a genuine attempt to source new ideas for how these could be used and what would help accelerate their take-up.

For the university it offers a chance to move their activities out from the (rather pleasant) ivory towers and into the heart of the city. Some of the space in Josephs is given over to workshops and presentations around innovation; a popular session is a hands-on course for start-ups where aspiring entrepreneurs get a chance to develop their ideas under the guidance of experienced mentors. A sort of Dragon's Den but with sweeter-tempered livestock.

So what's in the shop? First impressions are of somewhere light and airy, a bit like a museum or art gallery. There is a reception desk where you can pick up a tablet to accompany you; it interacts with each area in the shop and offers a commentary and useful background to what you are seeing/exploring. Beyond that there are the 'theme islands' – a series of spaces which participating firms can rent as a prototyping/exhibition area. Every three months Joseph's switches to a new theme – for example clothing and footwear, furniture, mobility solutions – and the islands are populated by a range of different players in that space. Unlike a museum or exhibition the emphasis is on getting involved, interacting with the products and services on show and adding your feedback and ideas to the mix. And, courtesy of IIS, you can expand your knowledge about what's on offer by using a handheld device linked to the Awiloc system which uses wi-fi to connect you to a world of information about what you are seeing.

It takes market research a long way beyond the focus group and sets up opportunities to get direct user and potential user input. (For example, using some more IIS technology (the SHORE system) it is possible to assess the emotional response of people as they walk around the displays. And their Awiloc technology not only gives users a guide as they walk around, it also collects data about their journeys, information searches and other indicators of consumer reaction). Joseph's provides a bridge between on-line and off-line worlds; for many exhibitors their core business is online but displaying their wares gives them a chance to open a 'pop-up' shop for a short period to interact directly with customers.

So far so interesting. It's an exhibition of what can be done and a way of bringing the kind of online customizers into the mainstream off-line world of high street shopping. But the real purpose behind Joseph's is to research this, trying to understand how we might become active 'co-creators' of products and the services around them. It's a well-established finding that people adopt innovations which fit with their lifestyles, aspirations and concerns – diffusion depends on 'compatibility'. So the best way to ensure this is to engage users up front with their ideas, shaping, configuring and essentially 'owning' a bit of the innovation. The big challenge, especially in services, is how to do this effectively? And that's where Joseph's comes in, as an 'on-site laboratory' in the high street exploring the what and how of co-creation. Part of the project is to develop ways of asking this question, using techniques borrowed from anthropology, part of it is to experiment with new ways of prototyping with users.

And like a good laboratory it can be reconfigured to suit different experiments. Everything about the place has been designed for flexibility so that the shop can adapt to the ways people want to interact with it. The staff (a mixture of permanent employees and university students) are not only on hand to help but also part of the research team, actively monitoring what's going on and making plans to change and change again in response to the signals they are picking up. So there's a good chance that the Joseph's you experience today won't be quite the same as the one you'll find tomorrow.

Joseph's has been open since May 2014 and it is constantly changing, shaping its format by engaging visitors in a co-creation process, inviting people in to explore, imagine and even play around. There are plenty of ways to make your views known – scribble them on the whiteboards and flipcharts which decorate the space, capture them on notepads, tell the staff and even (don't try this at home) write them on the walls! It continues to offer a laboratory for learning about co-creation and is growing in popularity as businesses realize the potential of working in such a laboratory space.

For more information pay a visit to Joseph's – either in person or via <http://www.josephs-service-manufaktur.de/en/>.