

Closed, or just changing names?

Today, on my way to the Metro, I walked past where a Mediterranean cafe has been located for the past five years. It was closed, and in the window was a sign saying that “Amai Japanese Crepe” was coming soon.

By the way, anybody know what the hell a Japanese crepe is?

When I got back to my office, I checked on the web to see if I could figure out what happened. I first went to the cafe’s website. It’s still there. Same address. No update on the situation. Then I went to Yelp, and I noticed it said the place was “temporarily” closed but a five-star review had just been posted yesterday. Hmm. Stranger and stranger. I went back to the cafe’s website, and clicked on their Twitter feed. Last post there was from 2015. Not useful at all. Then I went to the Facebook page. I clicked on “posts,” and found one from September 22, which says this:

Thank you everyone for your loyalty and support these past 5 years. We opened in Feburary 2012 and strived to bring a little taste of Isreal and classic Italian espresso to our customers. Now, it’s time to look to the future. XXX will be closed as of September 22 for renovations. We will be closed for two weeks to improve and update the cafe. We look foward to showing the improved us when we reopen.

Errors above appeared in the original post. I just x’ed out the name of the restaurant. There was also a picture of the sign about the Japanese crepes. That’s it. No more information. But now we know the restaurant is changing name and changing focus. What we don’t know is when this will happen, or what the hell a Japanese crepe is supposed to be.

To me, this is a classic and stupid communications failure. Why a failure? Here are the mistakes I see:

1. Failure to use their website to provide updated information.
2. Failure to provide complete information on the actual site (something like: XX cafe is transforming. We aim to re-open on [date]).
3. Failure to use social media appropriately. The Twitter feed should be deleted, and they could provide updates about the renovation, some information about what they will become. Not to mention that Facebook post was from a month ago, where they claim they would re-open in two weeks.
4. Failure to consider what customers need to know. Maybe this is the biggest problem. Nowhere do you really know what is going on.

It's hard to say what will happen here. People who came to this place looking for Israeli food are not necessarily going to feel good about a Japanese crepe (whatever that may be). Passersby will think that the old place is gone, and will not necessarily think the new place is associated with the old.

As with any change, clear and precise communication is necessary. It seems that to this restaurant, communication with customers is an afterthought.