

# Local cafe? Nope, it's a Starbucks

By Donna Goodison | Tuesday, July 21, 2009 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Business & Markets

When Starbucks launches its newest location in its hometown of Seattle on Friday, customers won't find its ubiquitous green and white siren logo anywhere in sight.

The shop's name - 15th Avenue Coffee and Tea, Inspired by Starbucks - comes from its address, and the Starbucks products for sale also have been rebranded.

It's the world's largest coffee chain's attempt to inject a neighborhood feel back into its brand with a traditional community coffeehouse that features hand-pulled espresso, beer and wine, and live entertainment by local musicians and poets.

Starbucks says the concept harkens back to its 1971 roots and first Pike Place store, but naysayers doubt a 16,000-store chain with \$10.4 billion in sales can create coffee houses that feel "local."

"When you're a huge multinational corporation, it's really difficult to become something that is 'neighborhoody,'" said Joshua Gerber, co-owner of the two 1369 Coffee Houses in Cambridge. "Even if you're doing things like poetry slams, live music and all the events-oriented things that are supposed to create community, it's really hard . . . without being local."

15th Avenue Coffee and Tea is the first of three neighborhood coffeehouses that will serve as pilots for possible future expansion. "It's going to be a reimagining of Starbucks, but it clearly will be a Starbucks," senior project manager Major Cohen said.

Starbucks, which reports earnings today, saw its U.S. same-store sales drop 10 percent and 8 percent in the last two quarters. Analysts expect it could be at least a year before they turn positive as McDonald's continues an aggressive push into coffee. Starbucks has been cutting costs and removing unrelated merchandise such as music CDs from stores. It's also curtailed expansion plans and intends to close 1,000 stores worldwide.

With its new neighborhood concept, the company is trying to reinvent the Starbucks experience after having "processed and re-engineered" away its original, pseudo-European coffeehouse experience over the years, said Robert Passikoff, president of Brand Keys Inc., a New York brand and customer loyalty consulting firm.

"Given the coffee category, the only thing there is to provide differentiation and real added value is the experience," he said. "There used to be a time when the Starbucks experience was the Starbucks experience, but now it's pretty much migrated to the coffee shop experience," he said.

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