

# Powering up the 'Plant

From extreme makeovers to extreme shut-downs, our team of experts offers up four distinctive visions for what to do with the poor old Powerplant

## Paul Knytl

It's sad to see that people are giving up on the old girl. Take it from someone who's been at this university for too long: the 'Plant used to be amazing—and it still can be. So why should we keep it open? For one thing, this city is losing venues for live music. While I believe that Edmonton has great local talent, the recent closure of Sidetrack and other venues should make us all protective of the ones still around.

The 'Plant also provides a conveniently located space for student groups to get together. For example, come in on a Thursday night to find the German and Scandinavian clubs (among others), getting drunk and facilitating intercultural exchanges—it's tradition. So let's provide a discount to student groups and encourage their regular use of the joint.

Love it or hate it, the 'Plant is a classic and unique student space. Far from inhospitable or warehouse-esque, I find its open-concept layout, with the beautiful red brick, exposed roof trusses, and mezzanine, both appealing and inviting. So how can we save the place? Restore people's confidence in the 'Plant experience. The number-one complaint I hear from people is the shitty service. They love the

location and prices aren't bad, but the service ranges from barely passable to eating a shit-sandwich.

The solution? Fire the old staff (sorry), hire new—and for god's sake, train them! And abolish the union: ask any decent server or bartender you know and they'll tell you that while their base wage sucks, they more than make up for it in tips—something that

comes about when you make your customers happy.

We have to keep absorbing the 'Plant's losses until it gets back on its feet—it provides a service to the student body and the city as a whole. Instead of abandoning a campus institution, let's see some real action and real solutions, not just gimmicks.

## Maria Kotovych

What's the one thing that's missing from campus? The SUB stage occasionally pretends to be one; student clubs create makeshift ones in classrooms and lecture halls. Yes folks, I'm talking about a movie theatre. The Powerplant is an awesome venue for concerts, but is there a concert every night? No.

Turning the 'Plant into a movie theatre on nights when there's no live music would be a great way for this cash vortex to start generating a bit of revenue. Currently SUB stage offers weekly movie nights, and these always draw a crowd. But background noise from the cafeteria can be a problem for those trying to enjoy the film.

An even bigger problem is that the main floor of SUB isn't licensed for alcohol. And many students wouldn't mind paying a few dollars to enjoy an ice cold beer along with their free movie. And since it looks like Coke is here to stay, students who like drinking that sludge and don't want to booze it up can enjoy a beverage with their movie as well. Throw in some french fries or popcorn (because salty foods make people buy drinks, and this makes bar owners happy), and you've got yourself a nice night out.

Student clubs and organizations that want to show movies or organize parties or other events could use the space as well. Of course, the 'Plant would have to ensure that student clubs got the space for free (or at a discounted rate, at least) in order to make it an attractive venue for student groups to hold events. With people buying food and drinks during club outings, the 'Plant could still make a profit, which is certainly better than watching it turn from a leaky bucket to an overturned slop pail.

## Jonn Kmech

The Powerplant has been a lost cause for several years now, but no one at the SU has had the *cojones* to admit it. As someone who's only been on campus for two years, I can tell you the stigma currently surrounding the establishment in the eyes of today's U of A student is too significant to overcome.

While I agree that the city is losing concert halls, we need to think about the musicians too. Isn't it fair to give them an audience? The Powerplant can't be sustained simply as a concert hall—there's no parking, which makes it less inviting to the general public, and the negative stereotype surrounding the building has caused venues like the Starlite Room and the lately departed Sidetrack Café to pull in the majority of prominent small-venue acts, which in turn pull in the crowds.

The image surrounding the 'Plant for the last few years has left it with a decidedly graveyard-like aura. First impressions mean everything, and when I went through Orientation almost two years ago, the overall impression that I got was that the Powerplant was definitely not the place to be. In my two years here, I've been there a total of three times, and I've never overheard anyone say, "Hey, let's go to the 'Plant on Friday night!"

It just isn't cool in the eyes of the new student generation anymore, and every incoming wave of students is going to develop the same ideas as long as that attitude dominates popular student opinion.

Unfortunately, the Powerplant is stuck in a never-ending cycle of pass-the-buck arguments. I would venture to guess that the majority of U of A students want *somebody* to do *something* with it—just somebody who isn't them. Anyone who does try to take the necessary risks gets shut down. Chris Cunningham's hookah idea was odd but novel, and could have sparked interest in the building that may have led to more solutions.

But, to continue losing money, the SU blindly chose to stay the course, as any deviation from their "vision" of cutting the largest possible holes in the pockets of students just doesn't jive. But as long as this status-quo mindset is maintained, the 'Plant will keep suffocating.

## Victor Vargas

The Powerplant needs a huge makeover. Right now it looks like an emo goth punk that cuts himself at night because he's being mocked by all the popular kids. And it doesn't help that its older brother, RATT, is sitting on his high horse laughing it up with them.

Let's face it, darkened bars are nice; bars that look like they came out of a Wes Craven movie are bad. We need to take some sledge hammers to the roof and begin bashing out holes for skylights. Let's then take that whole buffet part and light it on fire—it was a mistake and it needs to go. Then we need to go through the tables, the glasses and even the floor, and cheer it up a bit. People go to the Powerplant to be happy—not to get more depressed.

It also needs a new identity—preferably one that isn't just, "Hey, you're drinking in a former power plant." Hudsons

(formerly known as Scholars) has its library; the Elephant and Castle chain has that British pub feel going for it, and RATT has an amazing view of the city. The Powerplant needs something that will define it in its own right—I say we take advantage of all the international students and put a world theme to it. Let's have flags draped everywhere, some international beer, and menu options for people ranging from vegetarians to those who don't drink for religious reasons.

But looking nice is only part of the answer. Something needs to be done about the music, because the 'Plant's music is crap. I usually bring money for the jukebox just to play something that wasn't popular during the Great Depression. Either it needs a better play list, or we need to tie it into a radio station that will at least sound interesting—satellite radio, perhaps.

When all these changes are done, the last thing needed is for every student at Orientation to be marched through that bar and told that it's the most iconic bar on campus. Orientation is the best advertising we have at our disposal, yet we never seem take advantage of it in this way.

As you can see, a little hard work is all that's needed to turn the 'Plant from a nerdy kid that can't ask a girl out into a walking stud-muffin that's having a party every day.

