

ATTRACTIVE SELLING FLOORS – PART OF THE BRANDING FORMULA!

The Challenge

Facing increasing competition, scrutiny of customers, decreasing profit margins, the need to strengthen store as brand awareness, and limited funds to remodel stores? You're not alone. What a challenge! What an opportunity to use creativity and tools that may have been overlooked in a period of big spending to –

- win new customers;
- retain customers;
- entertain customers;
- creating a lasting positive impression of our stores;
- create associate positive morale and pride.

The Context

Let's look at history. The average retailer today dutifully performs product selection, purchasing, and fulfillment, usually without distinguishing itself. The good retailer adds product research on the front end and customer service on the back side of the retailing cycle. Old line retailers have defined customer service using tried and true human resources buzzwords and training methodologies and have used measurements of service (i.e., customer service indices) in some cases using outsourcing services to do so.

Financial pressures have also caused retailers to entertain their customers less, both in-store and in the community (through sponsorships and services provided in support of events). Retailers today seldom or infrequently sponsor or contribute services to the local theatre, symphony or opera, and they less frequently sponsor sporting events, amateur or professional. Retailers also have spent less money on the selling floor. The visual merchandising staffs of department stores that developed and fed the rest of retailing are a shadow of their former selves or are non-existent. The windows that gave life externally to high profile retailers are gone or have been replaced with mini-shadow boxes. Even in store displays using mannequins have been diminished in number and "theatre" and these techniques were rarely used anyway outside of department stores.

Only a few retailers have embraced the concept of "theatre" and made it part of their presentation and "branding" strategy. Branding means cultivating an image and tying it to your recognizable name and logo – in short, making a company memorable. We see it evident in various forms at Old Navy, Gap, Banana Republic, Crate & Barrel, Pottery Barn, Bass Pro/Outdoor World and Galyan's. These companies, in our opinion, have created a memorable experience for their customers and its been purposeful, the result of a brand vision and mission statement. They have all created elements of their brand that bonds with the customer – assortment, service level, location strategy, store décor, entertainment features, use of logo, unification of image through common visual images across all mediums including packaging. They have expanded their marketing vehicles over time and have campaigned consistently and persistently to continuously reinforce the brand message. They recognize that customer relevancy (brand of 1st choice) over time drives sales and profit improvement. That brand equity creates consumer loyalty, continually replenishes brand value and overcomes and defeats, eventually, product and price promotion that turns an assortment, and a brand, into a commodity.

What are the winning elements of Visual Presentation

In-store visual presentation is a major element of creating and reinforcing brand message and brand value. Done well it creates a memorable experience, an emotional experience and leaves the customer with a

lasting, positive image of the company. The key points from which an exciting visual presentation strategy can be developed include:

1. External Appearance – entrance, show windows, signage;
2. Flexible store design: internal space
3. Open views of the floor (no barriers): creates opportunity for themed areas and invites customers to visit those areas even if the product is seemingly of little interest to them
4. Open aisles: easy to move
5. Room to move within selling areas: able to handle large numbers of people comfortably, strollers and even larger people
6. Feature Statements or Areas:
7. Signage that complements (provides location, provides features, illustrates value statement) and illustrates change:
8. Gathering Places – customer service, restrooms, lounge and/or food service areas;
9. People: a leader that both understands your business and your customer, lives the lifestyle that is your business and has the requisite visual presentation skills to establish displays, present a selling floor and do so in a manner that can be taught and replicated chain wide.
8. Closing Process – cashwrap, checkout lane and exit to the store, send the right and consistent closing message to your customer.

In Summary – Brand Reinforcement Through Visual Presentation and Enticement