

Merchandising Sense

By Rich Kizer and Georganne Bender

Have you ever gone into a store to buy a single item and left with a cartload of things you hadn't intended to buy? Congratulations! You have fallen victim to some other retailers' merchandising strategy. When a store is merchandised well this becomes a common occurrence.

Take Target, for example. The average Target store isn't fancy, it's just a big box lined with basic gondolas. But what they do with the merchandise on those gondolas is magic. At Target it's not about the fixtures or the décor, the product is the star.

And how do you make your product the star? It's easy when your merchandising involves each of your customer's five senses.

Hearing: Audio Architecture

If your store is quiet then you may be missing out on sales. The music you play in your store does more than entertain shoppers – it provides a background that entices them to stay longer and buy more. We like music that gives shoppers a psychological lift, maybe that's why we're obsessed with disco. When played in a store, disco is the sound of money. Young or old, it makes shoppers smile. Another plus: the right music can make your associates more efficient, so if they're dragging at the end of the day, crank up the tunes.

Muzak Corporation has made background music a science. Visit their website <http://www.muzak.com> to learn more.

Taste: The Flavor of Success

You know our motto: Food is Good! And not just because we like to eat, which we do. A lot. Food is good because it's another tactic to entice shoppers to buy. Grocery stores serve veritable feasts in their aisles each weekend for two reasons: to get shoppers to try new products and to keep them in the store longer.

If you sell food this is a no brainer. But even if you don't, it's not a problem if you make food part of your store experience. Place a pitcher of cold lemonade near the front door to welcome shoppers on hot days. Do the same thing in the winter, replacing the lemonade with hot coffee or coco. Offer free bottles of water customized with your store's own label. Place a plate of cookies in the area where female shoppers park their guys. Implement our Kids Cookie Credit Card. Host a wine tasting. Partner with a local restaurant for an in-store event. The ideas are endless. Just remember that when customers try, they usually buy, so while their mouths are full, stick a cool product in their hands. (Drop us an email for your free Kids Cookie Credit Card template.)

Smell: Aromatherapy and Aromacology

Remember that old retail adage: "If it smells, it sells?" Turns out it's true: researchers have found that a pleasant-smelling environment has a positive effect on shopping behavior. We all respond to good scents, maybe because they have the power to evoke

memory. We've all gotten a whiff of something familiar and have been instantly transported to another place in time. That's what made aromatherapy so popular.

Now we have Aromacology: the science of scents and their effect on our minds and moods. Grapefruit, for example, will give shoppers more energy, vanilla will calm them when the store is hectic, pine will inspire positive feelings, and cinnamon is said to attract money. So put out the potpourri so that its scent permeates the air, or better yet, purchase scent diffusers and place them throughout the store. Visit ProLITEC Advanced Air Treatment Systems website at <http://www.prolitec.com> to learn more about the science of smell.

Touch: Please Play with the Merchandise

Some stores set such intricate displays that shoppers are afraid to touch them. Even worse are the sales people in clothing stores who follow shoppers around the store refolding sweaters and fluffing the displays customers have the audacity to touch. Give us a break – shoppers are suppose to mess up the store!

Make sure that your displays are set to invite customers to play. Instead of an intricate display of backpacks, expertly packed with school supplies, set them on a table the way department stores display expensive designer handbags. Add a mirror so the kids can see how cool they're going to look when mom buys them that special backpack. Add small table displays throughout the store with open product so shoppers can try before they buy. Choose an Item of the Day that store associates carry around with them as they work. Encourage them to show the item to customers, inviting them to take a look or try it out. Make a visit to your store a fun and interactive experience – not just a place to buy stuff!

Sight: Visual Merchandising

Much of what happens on your sales floor is visual – all of that wonderful merchandise is eye candy to a shopper. You can place product on your shelves and hope it sells, or you can use Visual

Merchandising techniques to make sure that it does.

Make a Vertical Move

Say you open a box of new product, and are about to set up an end feature display. There are two ways you can merchandise this product on the shelves: horizontally or vertically. If you choose a horizontal presentation, placing just one product per shelf, then you limit the amount of items a shopper is likely to see as she scans a shelf. If she only glances at the second shelf, she will only see that particular product. That's why a vertical presentation is the better bet.

Any time you display product in a vertical slice, you expose shoppers to a greater variety of the assortment at any eye level. We're naturally inclined to read from left to right, so Vertical Merchandising encourages shoppers to see your entire selection of merchandise, regardless of which shelf they choose to gaze upon.

Small Left, Large Right

Say you sell Product X in two sizes. A popular trick of the trade involves displaying the small size of a product on the left, and the larger size on the right. This technique works because most customers are right handed, and will unconsciously reach for the item closest to their right hands, rather than reaching across their body or shopping cart. Walk your aisles – you'll find endless opportunities for this trick in your store.

Find the Hot Spot

Every single section of every single fixture has a "Hot Spot" – the part of the fixture that

sells the best. Most shoppers tend to stop and look at the center of a product category or display, so the Hot Spot silently points out – sells – important merchandise.

You can locate the Hot Spot on any fixture by simply drawing an imaginary cross through its center. In the case of a 12' gondola, that's 3' on center, you will find a Hot Spot in the center of the fixture, and a Hot Spot in each of the four individual sections. Another merchandising tip: Since most customers will reach for product with their right hand, the position just to the right of the center of the cross is an equally hot display area. This technique is called "Hot Spot and One to the Right." It's the perfect place to display items you don't want shoppers to miss.

Throw 'em a Curve

Any time you display product on a slanted shelf, you increase what's known as the shopper's "Strike Zone". It's called Visual Curve Merchandising and it increases the amount of product a shopper sees in just one glance because they look up and down at a display, as well as forward.

You may have great product gathering dust on flat shelves. Try an new slant! Call your favorite fixture company and invest in inexpensive plastic "fencing" that will hold the product in place when you slant your shelves. Once you try this technique you will be amazed at the difference it makes in presentation and sales.

Pile it high and watch it fly? Not in your store! Instead choose to engage shoppers and all their senses. Create an in-store experience that's uniquely your own. And if you need help, we're just a telephone call away!

Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender are retail anthropologists. They stalk and study that elusive of mammals – the retail. They are nationally recognized experts on customer psychology, "messing with the media", marketing & promotion, and everything retail. In 2004 they were named two of the Retail Industry's Most Influential People. Kizer & Bender have been featured on ABC National News; their client list includes a Who's Who in American business, and their book, "Champagne Strategies on a Budget!" has helped thousands of retailers improve their bottom line.



INSTEAD OF AN INTRICATE DISPLAY OF BACKPACKS, EXPERTLY PACKED WITH SCHOOL SUPPLIES, SET THEM ON A TABLE THE WAY DEPARTMENT STORES DISPLAY EXPENSIVE DESIGNER HANDBAGS. ADD A MIRROR SO THE KIDS CAN SEE HOW COOL THEY'RE GOING TO LOOK WHEN MOM BUYS THEM THAT SPECIAL BACKPACK.