

ARE DEALERS AND SUPPLIERS ALL 4 ONE?



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DE-STRESS Your SHOPPERS

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Customers often complain that shopping is just too much of a hassle. They complain that stores are crowded and hard to shop.

They complain that they can't find what they came in to buy, and that they can never find a sales associate when they need one. Face it, your customers are stressed out. We bet you are too, that's why we've decided to bring you our five Simple Strategies to help you De-Stress Shopping in your store, and sell more while you're at it. Here it goes:

1 Become a Customer Advocate

As a retailer, you have so many titles. Order some new business cards, because here's another one: Customer Advocate.

Customer Advocates make time to understand how their customers' think and feel. They see things as customers, not as retailers. Customer Advocates watch what customers do in their stores, so they are able to understand why customers' buy the things they buy, and why they do the sometimes strange things they do when they shop. It's easy to become a Customer

Advocate, just watch what goes on in your store and document what you find. You'll see patterns emerge that will lead you to new merchandise sets and policies that favor the customer over the store in ways that are fair to both.

This exercise isn't just for store associates, every single person who owns, or is involved in running a store, chain or independent, needs to get down and dirty on the sales floor, working with customers. Drop us an email for a copy of our "How to Stalk Customers" exercise.

2 Help Customers Feel Right At Home

Remember the theme song from Cheers? "Sometimes you want to go where everyone knows your name, and they're always glad you came." That goes for your customers, too.

Many customers have the perception that you can't get personalized service in chain stores, and shopping in smaller stores can be intimidating. We don't buy either one of those stereotypes, but to avoid them it's your job to create an environment that makes customers feel welcome in your store – and you have to ensure that store associates

have the same welcoming attitude. Friendly offers of a subscription to your store newsletter, a bounce back coupon, class schedule, or membership to a store club are easy ways to break the ice.

Just offering your hand, and introducing yourself to a customer, creates a bond. Challenge everyone on your team to introduce themselves to at least five new customers a day, and to address customers they already know by name. Studies show that sales can increase merely because store associates are nice to customers.

3 Make Sure Customers Can See Your Entire Store

The more customers can see, the more they are likely to buy. How are the Sight Lines in your store? Can customers easily see into and around your store, or are fixtures placed in a way that limits their view of all the wonderful merchandise you have for sale?

Try this exercise: Stand in your front door and look around. How much of the store can you actually see? Note all fixtures that block your view. Now move to each corner, and the other main areas of the sales floor (service counters, check out counter, etc.), and



do the same exercise. Each time you “run into a wall,” you will want to make a note to remove or relocate those fixtures that block your sight line. Do this exercise each and every time you re-merchandise your sales floor. This will not only help make your store seem more open and appealing, it will make it easier for store associates to better serve customers.

4 Constantly Communicate Through Signing Program

Signs are often referred to as “Silent Salespeople,” and with good reason. Your in-store signing allows you to communicate with customers without ever saying a word. Signing also reassures customers that they are making the right product choice. There are three important signing zones in your store:

Zone One Signing: These signs are placed high above the eye level, and are best used to direct traffic in the store. Zone One signing usually consists of departmental and directional signing; both make it easier for time-starved and stressed out customers to locate what they are looking for. If yours is a self service store, or if you tend to run lean on help, then Zone One signing is a must in your store.

Zone Two Signing: The area just above eye level is best used to display promotional signing, sales event signing, and marketing messages. It is also the best place for aisle markers; signs that hang above the valley in-between two gondolas, identifying which merchandise is housed there.

Zone Three Signing: These are the signs you place at average customer eye level – roughly 5’6” from the floor. There are many uses for Zone Three Signing: to announce sale or special purchases or to outline the product’s features, advantages and benefits. Zone Three is also a good place for flyers and other point-of purchase materials provided by vendors. Use Zone Three signing to highlight any information that will help the customer make an informed buying decision.

What your store signing looks like will depend on your store décor. Generally speaking, you will want to print your signs on your computer or

with a professional sign machine. You can purchase them as well. Check out the Hubert Company’s great selection of signing packages and accessories on their Website: <http://www.hubert.com>.

Be careful with handwritten signing because it can be viewed as non-professional. That being said, we’ve seen wonderfully creative handwritten signs used effectively in all kinds of stores. If you have carefully created a handwritten sign, on quality card stock, then you are probably okay. You’ll know a bad sign when you see one.

5 Help Customers Remember The Things They Always Forget

We’ve all run into stores to pick up a few things, gotten side tracked, and forgotten half of what we came in to buy. We’ve also all purchased some of the items necessary to complete a project, but not all, resulting in frustration and a return trip to the store. Helping your customers remember the things they frequently forget not only makes shopping easier, it helps you increase add on sales.

- Cross-Merchandising is a good place to start. In a well-merchandised drug store, for example, you will find disposable razors merchandised alongside the panty hose; paper towels housed next to window cleaner, and facial tissues right there next to the cough and cold medicine. You might even find toothbrushes hanging on a clip strip in the candy aisle.

Think of the cross-merchandising potential in your own store. At a store meeting, challenge each of your associates to come up with at least three cross-merchandising opportunities, then put them to work. Each time you bring in a new item or category, look for items you can cross merchandise with it. Visit Southern Imperial, Inc. at <http://www.southernimperial.com> for a great selection of cross-merchandising fixtures and accessories.

- Create project lists and use them as point-of-purchase marketing in key spots throughout the store. If a customer is interested in hosting

a themed party for her eight year old, a list of supplies she will need to thrill the kids would be extremely helpful. House your project lists in individual book racks, or hang on clip strips with the appropriate merchandise, and make sure your associates keep copies with them in the quick draw position.

You can even take your list concept a step farther. Grocer Harris Teeter enables customers to create a shopping list on their website that can be printed and taken to the store. A very smart use of technology – do this on your own website!

- Stock must-have basic items at each checkout counter. We were making a purchase at OfficeMax and had forgotten to pick up a pack of paper that was on our list. We didn’t have time to go and get it, and wait in line again. When the cashier asked if we had found everything we were looking for, we told her we forgot the copy paper. “No, problem,” she said, and reached under the counter and grabbed a pack.

Upon further inspection, we noticed many basic items housed under each checkout counter. Mediocrity borrows and genius steals – steal this idea! Identify the basic items customers frequently forget and keep them handy at each checkout. If you don’t have enough room, stock a basket and keep it nearby. Refill it each night.

These five Simple Strategies are just plain, old-fashioned, relationship-building, customer de-stressing, common sense. Sure, each will help you sell more product, but they’ll also help customers shop your store with ease. And that’s what it’s all about, isn’t it?

Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender are nationally recognized as experts in generational diversity, “messing with the media,” and everything retail. They recently presented two sessions at Ed



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