

Retail Sales: Getting Customers in the Mood

When it comes to building a retail business, once people are aware of your store, how do you get them to move from browse, to buy, to repeat customer?

Much of a store's success has to do with how well you take advantage of your physical space. Before making any big changes, you'll want to review the elements of customer enticement, then do a quick assessment of what's working and what's not.

Make your brand come alive

Retail marketing offers an incredible opportunity to expand your brand into the third dimension. It's excellent to have a logo and mission statement to define what your business offers, but there's nothing so compelling as customers being able to actually experience it. Think of it as an extension of the personality you already convey in all your other marketing communications (signage, advertising, promotions, etc.).

Take Angie Bricker, owner of [The Natural Baby Shop](#) in Kelowna, a store that's all about raising babies in a healthy, environmentally conscious world. Her brand conveys the idea of simple, fresh, pure living and is represented with images of happy infants and parents. The visual brand is consistent from business cards to website.

When it came time to design and decorate the actual store, Angie took it one step up and ensured her brand also extended to the experience of her customers. "We wanted our customers to have a warm, comfortable and healthy experience. We brought in the same colours that are on all our marketing materials as a continuation of the brand and made sure that everything in the store points to that idea of healthy living – from the way it's decorated, to the products we sell, even down to the clothing we wear," says Angie.

Is your brand about smooth sophistication or youthful enthusiasm? Does it say restful calm or maybe inspired fire? Or, perhaps it's funky goddess. Whatever your brand's personality, let it come out!

Oooh, what a feeling

Much goes into creating the vibe, the ambience of a successful store. Yes, ambience. You want to evoke a feeling when people walk into your store. An attitude. The trick is figuring out which attitude. If your products are focused on active children, you need to exude a completely different vibe than a spa catering to the busy, executive parent who needs a respite from noise and demands.

Getting in touch with the vibe you want customers to sense and feel means looking at the dimensions and flow of the space, in addition to capitalizing on your brand personality.

Kate McKenzie, owner of [Got Scraps!](#) in Revelstoke, set up her shop specifically to inspire customers. She wanted them to know scrapbooking isn't only for the creative, it isn't difficult, and it doesn't have to be expensive.

Got Scraps! features a big workspace with all the tools and supplies anyone could ever need to create a scrapbook where customers can sit down, get comfortable and give it a try without inhibition. To enhance the experience and encourage creativity, Kate also has a section of the store dedicated to displaying sample scrapbook pages.

"There is a misconception that you must be artistic to be good at scrapbooking, which can be very intimidating for people; I know because I was one of those people," laughs Kate. "Whether a customer is an experienced scrapbooker or someone brand new to the idea we want to help them feel relaxed, welcome and inspired to create their own books."

Extending your brand into your physical space and making customers feel good are both great ways to engage with customers, show them that you are focused on their needs, and encourage them to purchase and return.

Devilish details

Don't forget the technical details. You can also directly influence how customers feel and what they come to expect in your store with features that are often taken for granted like lighting, layout, music, even scent. Burned out light bulbs and dusty shelves say something completely different than a tidy front desk and organized display cases. Then again, some shops are meant to be jumbled. All of these elements affect how a customer feels in your space and the likelihood of them making the transition from browse to buy.

Restaurants often do an excellent job of managing the details, right down to the style and quality of cutlery on the table. If you want customers to experience a quick in and out, keep it crisp, brightly lit, and shiny clean. If you want customers to enjoy an evening out sampling the chef's creations, settle them into a cozy booth and keep the lighting low, the music soft, the wait staff attentive.

Yeah, Yeah, Customer Service

Speaking of customer service... Nothing kills atmosphere quite as quickly as surly or non-existent service. Some shops, like the infamous "soup Nazi" of the Seinfeld television show, manage to get away with chip-on-the-shoulder attitude, because it is very intentional and part of the brand personality.

On the flip side, quality customer service isn't about sugary sweet either. It's about being genuine. It comes right back to how you want your customers to feel in your space, how you want them to experience your brand. It's best to hire staff who already have the right attitude, whether calming or boisterous, but that's not always easy. If finding any staff -- let alone appropriate staff -- is a challenge, be clear about expectations and lead by example.

Show off your best attributes

Merchandising, merchandising, merchandising. It's all about showing off the goods, honey!

One element of merchandising is how products are displayed throughout the store. You can sort by colour, size, category...the list is endless. I love stores that have the same product in several different

areas because they refuse to limit its potential. That's the attitude! I might not appreciate its beauty in one combo, but in another grouping it catches my eye.

That's basic, and highly effective, cross-marketing. Many people cannot visualize or imagine the end result – they need your help. When customers see how festive a holiday-dressed table looks, they are much more inclined to buy the extras to recreate the look at home, rather than risk trying to be creative on their own. Trust me, it works!

Another element of merchandising is tracking product turnover so you know what products sell best in which areas within the store.

Judith Johannsson's passion for retail brought her out of retirement with the purchase of Ghost rider Trading Company, a clothing and shoe store in Fernie. Her merchandising strategy is right on the money: focus on customer flow through the store, and identify "hot spots" to feature prime merchandise.

"It's important to look at the dollar of sales per square foot in the store to see if where you've placed a product is paying off. In a small business it's easy enough to identify if one corner is not producing sales as it should, then assess whether you have the most interesting merchandise upfront where customers can see it, or if you need to move it around," advises Judith. "Keep new and fresh items in the hot spots, and maximize margins per square foot."

Rotating new product into the hot spots also keeps the store interesting and encourages repeat visits.

Take the test

Now that you know what to look for, do an assessment of your own store. Grab a coffee up or better yet, skip the coffee and bring a notebook and pen, cross the street and take a walk past your store. Notice how it appears from the outside. Then cross the street and walk back to the store, noticing what your customers see. Then do the same inside. Browse. Listen. Observe.

It's easy to stop seeing your own store after a while, like that crack in the ceiling, so really take time to notice. Be impartial and look at your business with fresh eyes and find ways to get your customers "in the mood."

Look for ways to express your brand in every detail of the store. Showcase your products in their best light, and ensure it's easy for customers to buy. This will increase the likelihood of moving them from browse, to purchase, to repeat customer.

Written in collaboration with Liz Gaige, owner of Market Navigators Consulting. Liz specializes in bringing creativity and a shot of inspiration to business and marketing strategies for businesses of all sizes. By her own admission, she does her best work when she's just a little bit cheeky! Contact her at liz@marketnavigators.ca or 604-763-1475.

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