

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

People Get Ready

At this past January's NAMM show I was talking with a small group of retailers from around the country about the use of technology in our day-to-day operations. I was actually using the time to conduct my own "technology in the workplace" poll. The results? I found that while they all had standard point-of-sale systems and Internet connectivity, that was basically the extent of the technology in their stores. Sure, they had personal iPhones and Android devices. A few had iPads (received a month earlier for Christmas, and not really in use yet). But when I asked if they had thought of using technology to bring customers in their doors, I got blank stares. When I asked if they were using any technologies such as Wi-Fi cameras in their teaching rooms, or simple things like QR codes in store or advertisements, my questions were met with answers like, "I'm not sure I know what that is," and "How would I use that in my shop?"



I believe with a little imagination you can find lots of great ways to incorporate all sorts of "tech toys" into your business. You should not be waiting for your customers to show you the latest technologies; you should be showing them. If you turn them on to something new then you are the go-to, ahead-of-the-curve place to be.

I recommended that the folks I was speaking with visit two booths at the show that were using technologies they probably had not seen before. I encouraged them to then think about how they could take what they saw home and use it in their own shops. Here's what they saw:

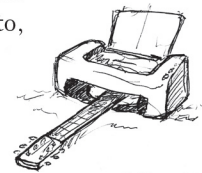
BRING PAPER TO LIFE

A major drum manufacturer celebrating the 20th anniversary of its popular bass drum pedals had these great looking stickers in their booth — a snake head sticking out of a circle. On the bottom of the sticker was a message asking you to download the free mue Alive! app. Once you did, you would point your phone's camera at the sticker. Once the app recognized the image, the snake started to move, climbing out of the circle, then wrapping itself around the screen of your

phone and disappearing. Then, in the center of the sticker where the snake had been, came videos of the company's endorsers talking about the pedal. Sounds crazy, right? It *is* crazy — and every single customer in my shop that I have shown it to loves it! There are multiple apps out there that bring paper to life and add interactivity (augmented reality apps) to just about any product. Check out TouchCode (touchcode.de) for just one example.

NEW DIMENSIONS

A few years ago I read an article outlining how 3D printers were not only going to change manufacturing but also soon reach everyday users. Large 3D printers at the time



were being used to "print" one-off, specialized medical implants, jewelry, racecar parts and custom mobile phone cases. Instantly intrigued, I started thinking of all the ways this technology could be used in my shops. I soon discovered that a decent 3D printer was still out of my price range. But today, prices are starting to come down, making the printers more attainable for the average home or business user. They work essentially like the printer attached to your computer; you hit a print button and they go to work.

Incorporate emerging trends and technologies in your business before your customers and competitors do

A 3D printer uses materials such as production grade plastics to build successive layers until the object being printed appears. The possibilities for this type of printing are nearly endless. If you have a repair shop you can make one-off parts for instruments, or better yet, customized parts that can't be obtained on the market. How about custom tone or volume knobs

an online store to purchase — unless you are a go-to resource for customers seeking to understand the technologies and how they are used. Be that, and you raise your chances for a sale twofold. Your utilization of emerging trends, and demonstrations of how to effectively manipulate them to enhance your customer's lives, create a

unique environment and experience. You should endeavor to offer that one-of-a-kind customer experience that no one else can duplicate. Well, at least until they buy their own 3D printer. **MI**

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with your shop's logo on them, or one-off promotional giveaways (Small guitar replicas? Employee name tags?). Search Google and YouTube for 3D printers and you will discover weeks worth of reading and watching material.

ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCES

In today's competitive retail marketplace you need to embrace new technologies and be ahead of the curve to set yourself apart. You can no longer rely solely on the latest guitar colors, drum configurations and crafty displays at your entrance to woo customers. If you understand and incorporate emerging trends and technologies in your business before your customers and competitors do, then you are that much farther ahead as these things advance. At the very least it's important to understand that your customers (and competitors) are spending more and more time doing their homework and seeing the latest gadgets, developments and technologies on YouTube and around the Internet. Once there, they will click over to



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