

IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

BRANDING YOUR STORE

What does it mean to be a brand? The concept of branding in retail spans from very simple to complex. It can be as plain as a geometric logo — the golden arches — or as multi-sensory as a coconut-scented, grass-skirted Hawaiian dancing exhibition at a travel show. In music retail, we fixate on the *product* brands that bejewel our shelves and showroom hooks, but let me offer other considerations, other components of the more holistic “branding” experience.

STAFF VS. PRODUCT

I wish I had a nickel for every time a customer confessed, “I don’t buy from you because of what your store sells, it’s because of who sells it.” Today, there are so many channels to acquire our wares. A sale happens routinely in the store because a salesperson was able to put the customer at ease, not to mention justify the acquisition. Often, customers make purchases simply because they connect with a salesperson. Your staff needs to be liked and respected. They are as much of your store brand as the lines you carry — arguably



more. Don’t settle for cheap when it comes to staffing.

CONVENIENCE

No doubt, our fast-paced culture places overwhelming demands on personal time. What amazes me is how much owners obsess over price, neglecting consumers’ crushing demands for convenience. Customers may already desire what we offer, but price is essentially moot if we make purchasing products difficult and dilute the services necessary for a complete, fulfilling musical activity. Cheap will not

satisfy if we aren’t open the hours they want to shop, able to prepare an instrument for maximum playability or offering vital accessories. Convenience is a commodity customers will pay for. Offer it, and don’t be afraid to charge for it, occasionally.

RELEVANCE

What happens if what we sell is no longer what customers want to buy? I’m not referring to a product category — Lord knows we’ve got enough accordion jokes already — but look at other retail services that sold in past culture. Remember when the gas station attendant looked under your hood while he filled your tank?

There may well be services or products that don’t jibe with current customer demands. Your store “brand” needs to resonate with the times.

STORE ENVIRONMENT

People can be motivated by deeply subliminal factors. They can be scared off by a store smell, a lack of cleanliness or a salesperson with horrible breath. On the other hand, warm lighting and a soft, welcoming carpet padding can intensify their comfort level.

This multi-sensory experience can be hard to shake out because it’s so subconscious, but you need to know where you stand. It can be a subtle tipping point on a singular transaction or a pleasant experience that inspires the customer’s perpetual returning.

FAMILIARITY

Relationships are two-way. It’s important to look for opportunities outside of traditional media buying to be a visible part of your community. Loaning gear for local concerts in return for minimal print acknowledgement (we love parking the store’s logoed van outside concert venues), sending your high-profile staff out as experts for educational talks and conferences, attending the concerts and performances of your customers — these “investments” pay back in spades.

Notice how little these elements have to do with actual, tangible product? We have to remember that our brand is much more than the brands we sell. **MI**

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