

IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

SELL LIKE DON DRAPER

If you're like me and a huge fan of the AMC hit TV drama "Mad Men," you are familiar with the advertising prodigy of lead character Don Draper. In some ways, the show is a darker version of "Bewitched," in which an ad agency hunts for tricks to win a deep-pocket account, although with much more interesting and complex characters. Having grown up in the 1960s myself, I find the scenery and costumes as fascinating as the stories, but as a self-confessed marketing geek, my favorite part of the show is watching its star's advertising prowess.

Draper swaggers with an uncanny, mystical charisma. We see his underlings often struggle to connect product with consumer, let alone win the heart of the client himself. Don consistently saves the day with a keen discernment in marketing an octave higher than his talented staff. And his No. 1 rule always seems to yield a winning campaign.

This rule could be summed up as: The customer is the product. Draper's staff often gets sidetracked from the rule, so it should be no surprise that our retail employees often overlook it, too. In one classic episode, he's pitching the benefits of



Applying the legendary TV ad exec's No. 1 rule of advertising to music retail

this new Kodak wheel-shaped invention that shows slides. Everyone's wrapped up in the flashy technology. (Remember, this is the '60s, decades before PowerPoint). But he pitches the idea of a "carousel." Nostalgia. A cold piece of technology becomes a ticket to a profound personal experience — and a broader base of new customers. Genius.

DRAPER ON PRODUCT

How much of what we invest in training is simply teaching product specs? "Mahogany is warmer, spruce is brighter, rosewood and ebony denser." But what does that do for the customer's personal experience? OK, monel is harder in a piston, but what does that do to improve a trumpet player's life? Yes, these are important features, but what if we start with the player and work backwards, rather than the other way around?

Thinking of a guitar player, not the guitar, as a product not only revolutionizes our approach to educating about (and selling) the instrument but also sets us up for myriad accessory sales to complete the player's experience. Don Draper would look at our wall of guitars and, rather than obsess about stop tailpieces and rosewood fingerboards, be thinking, "Is this guitar for a 14- or 44-year-old? Is it for stage or garage-band socializing? Will it need an amp for the player to be malevolently loud? What will she need to strap it on and look aesthetically pleasing while she's playing? What will this guitar mean to the player's self-esteem in front of friends and family?" Draper would think about the

experience, not cold numbers and features.

DRAPER ON DESIGN

The way we lay out our stores can also be altered to convey that the customer is the product. Everything on the floor delivers a confluence of emotion, store branding and technology. Draper would create a space for auditioning instruments similar to the player's own lifestyle — an inviting chair; adequate playing space; less interference from nearby noise, aural pollution and foot traffic. He'd put up posters of contemporary artists validating that our wares are used by the best. He'd put in a full-length mirror.

He'd establish post-sale communication that's consistent with the lifestyle, keeping customers aware of store clinics, enticing new gear and sales promotions. He'd create environments and events where our customers could hook up with others who use that gear, too.

Your product is not on the walls or shelves. It just walked in your door. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 30-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.