

# IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## THE IGNORE MODE

If you've walked the Las Vegas strip recently, you've experienced a new echelon of "pushy." Vegas continues to rework high stakes tactics of luring potential customers more deeply into the Vegas "experience." In the last couple years, Sin City has eliminated the traffic-throttling of the pedestrian herd of the '90s by investing billions in overpasses and walkways, allowing a steady stream of profit opportunity to meander without barrier to the slew of slot machines, shopping and dining. Barely 50 steps from Las Vegas Boulevard's pathway you can enjoy a gourmet burger by Gordon Ramsay or take an escalator up to Bubba Gump Shrimp, along with a plethora of other fast casual restaurants and trendy boutiques.

The new Vegas speed bump now is human — the "barker." You can hardly walk 30 paces without someone selling you show tickets, helicopter rides, real estate and of course, sex. Initially you don't notice it so much, but after the 25th person in a half hour verbally tackling you with his "opportunity," you stop getting annoyed and settle into



**You don't have to be pushy to get through to customers who are 'just looking'**

"ignore mode." Tourist survival in Sin City's new selling circus requires the mask of indifference. As someone in sales, I go from compassion for these commission-starved saps to resentment in their attempts to exploit my good will.

Is this experience all that different from a typical music store showroom floor? Let's go out on a

limb and say sometimes it doesn't stray far. When it happens, staff should know simple tricks to deal with the "zombie" customer. Understand, it is not just that new customers don't trust us; it's from the moment they step in, they are programmed to ignore us. "Just looking?" Oh no, they aren't!

**Finding commonality.** Folks are in the store because of an interest in music (or purchasing for someone who is). That is immediate fodder for solidarity, but a stranger may completely conceal, or worse, camouflage their interest on purpose, simply because they don't want to show any cards. They might feel they are giving up a competitive sales advantage if they reveal why they are there, especially if in the early shopping stage. Breaking through customer "ignore mode" requires conscious conversational approaches.

**Strip the veneer of distrust.** Think of customer suspicion as a veneer, something that needs to be lightly sanded away (not with an ax). A smile and a carefully crafted question about something other than what they are looking at can be a decoy for a deeper conversation soon after. Talk periphery diversions, the weather, the

instrument they are carrying in, the item on the wall that caught their eye. If they don't think you're going to pounce on them to line your pockets with commission, they will start talking. And you'll listen.

**Oblique stare.** The best conversations I've had with my teenage daughter have been driving to school. The reason? She's captive in the car, but we're both facing the same direction and not directly at each other. Direct eye-to-eye contact can be intimidating, and the physicality of you looking the same direction can communicate you are after the same mutual goal — their solution.

If you are a natural extrovert, this all might seem extreme. It used to be just introverts that retreated into their shell, but today with so much ad bombardment, spam mail and Web banners, consumers play this distance game. Handed a smartphone immediately out of the womb, today's younger salesforce struggles with conversational proficiency. Often they can benefit from these 21st century sales sensibilities. **MI**

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