

IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

CLEAN, HONEST INGREDIENTS

Foraging through the grocery aisle to summon plans for the evening meal, I stumbled across a can label that made me chuckle. A can of refried beans read, “Clean honest ingredients.”

I grew up with aphorisms of “honesty is the best policy,” but I also relished plenty of stories of pranks and adolescent flatulence jokes about beans. I’d never pondered the importance of “integrity” in this North American food staple. This audacious Madison Avenue culinary branding campaign stirred me.

No stranger to the filling protein prowess of legumes, lentils and kidney beans in a Meat-is-Murder pop culture context, I could grasp the “clean” plea, but “honesty”? It struck me odd, this alien enticement, but then I consider the current state of advertising. Sunday sports programming pitches cars not for their machismo truck engine Hemis and towing power of the ’80s and ’90s, but the warmth of family and love in personal transportation. We buy phones not for talking as our parents did but to document our lives in pictures and monitor cardio exercise. A premier line of sports clothing and equipment trades pitching comfort and durability for a trendy social justice stance. So many off the menu benefits, why would this be any different?



Pitching musical instruments today is like selling clean, honest living

THE INGREDIENTS

It makes me examine music retail and how we pitch our products to our customers. We go beyond explaining their unique features and how they enrich the musical experience. A spruce top yields crispness and gives the guitarist sonic definition; a .547 bore lends a trombonist’s lungs room for robust power. Benefits, advantages — but do these ingredients in any way yield “honesty” like a can of refried beans? What do they offer us in “clean” living?

CLEAN LIVING

Segments of our trade certainly brag a social conscience. For the past four decades I’ve been in business, I’ve seen the ecological shift of manufacturers abandoning environmentally destructive chemicals, visible campaigns to recycle strings and batteries, and biodegradable packaging that won’t encumber the planet with plastic-packed landfills. We have prevalent fundraising and industry awareness programs for the poor and underprivileged to participate in community music opportunities.

HONESTY

I get where 21st century commerce craves honesty more than ever. A century ago, all we had to deal with was Medicine Show deceitfulness, delivered by a single or handful of local entities, a newspaper ad or a slick salesman face-to-face, but today in the age of information, we are perpetually bombarded by multichannel hype and misinformation.

Beyond traditional media, we’re coerced by social media advertising, steered by covert Google search algorithms in our web browsers, and endlessly spammed by fraudulent nefarious email entities. The world of nutrition is ripe (pun intended) with questionable claims of fat-free, rich in vita-

mins, and of course, improvable declarations of enzyme and life-altering supplements.

Consider how we price products on our shelves. Is it gross profit or profit that is gross? I’m weary of vendors with false promises of inflated 50 to 70 percent margins in their wares. Today’s information highway means when I sell at that pricing, any number of mouse click searches away I can be easily exposed for my greed and, I’ll warn you, lose a customer forever. We are constantly judged, and on an international scale. In 21st century retail, we trade for slimmer margins with faster turns or bundle our goods with unique and irreplaceable services.

But back to beans, our challenge is even more multifaceted than pitching the benefits of foodstuff. It’s more complicated, but the good news is we can establish direct relationships with our customers, gaining a life of trust through meeting their and broader community’s musical needs in positive ways. The opportunity to engage others into a better quality of life through better equipment, accessories and lessons is the ultimate opportunity to encourage clean, honest living — through music! **MI**

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