

Ten Tips For Updating Your Store

As unpredictable consumer spending makes the retail environment fiercely competitive, it is becoming increasingly difficult for retailers to retain old customers and win new ones. The producers of GlobalShop, the world's largest annual retail design exposition, have compiled tips for evaluating your store and preparing it to compete.

Tear Down Walls

Many stores built in the '70s, '80s, and early '90s feel "walled-in." A store should offer broad, open vistas with a commanding view of the merchandise.

Retailers should look around their stores from multiple angles to see if all the walls are necessary and if space could be used more wisely. Allowing customers a panoramic view also encourages them to visit parts of the store they might otherwise have missed.

Let Your Windows Do The Talking

Customers should get a taste of what your store has to offer before they enter. As time becomes more limited, consumers are spending less time strolling in and out of stores. Many simply look in the window.

Retailers such as Crate & Barrel and The Gap have storefronts featuring floor-to-ceiling windows to give customers a look at what's inside.

Create 'Strike Points' That Hit Home

Retailers should make shopping as easy and painless as possible by grouping complementary items together. Called 'strike points,' visual displays that feature several items that can be used together are helpful for busy shoppers.

Research shows that consumers purchase merchandise based on color, style and price, in that order. Using strike points saves customers time and encourages additional purchases.

Be Different by Design

According to Retail Renovation ROI*, a 1995 study commissioned by The Store Fixturing Show and conducted by Deloitte & Touche LLP, retail design and fixturing improvements can increase sales and strengthen ties between retailers and customers.

Store fixtures should encourage customers to interact with merchandise. A store should not feature a group of mismatched fixtures, but rather a mix of fixtures that complement each other and match the overall personality of the store. The trend in store fixtures is moving toward elliptical shapes, raw woods, galvanized steel and lacquered medium-density fiberboard.

"It's important to invest in high-quality fixtures and to have a long-term plan when purchasing," said Doug Hope, producer of GlobalShop and publisher of Display & Design Ideas. "Renovations are a large investment and you want to make them wisely so they'll last long."

Consumers also must connect with the retail environment. Since merchandise among stores is very similar, retailers must differentiate themselves by design. Retailers should strive to become the customer's destination store. Since most consumers have limited time, they leave their homes with a particular purchase and a particular store in mind.

Becoming a destination store is a matter of offering a narrow product category with a broad mix of merchandise. Consider your target customers' needs and provide them with the selection and service they require. Ensure that they'll think of your store as the place to find the items on their list.

Make Shopping Social

The world is becoming more detached as people spend more time in front of their computer screens and in their cars. Shopping, however, can be a social

opportunity and stores need to recognize that fact to attract customers.

Scan your store for unused or poorly designed areas and use the space to create a seating area for customers. Well-designed seating areas do not require extensive merchandising floor space. A sofa (plus a few strategically placed chairs and tables) offers tired and weary customers an escape from the pressures of shopping, and a chance to rest while waiting to be helped. A shopper who finds a place to rest will be more likely to associate a positive shopping experience with that particular store. Be sure to provide home decor books and magazines with photo albums of frame designs you've created.

Create Clear Traffic Patterns

Customers should have a clear path through the store. From the moment they enter, customers should be directed through all departments and given access to as much merchandise as possible. Don't let them head right for your design counter without looking at what you've got displayed.

Evaluate Your Lighting

Lighting should complement the store's overall personality and allow customers to see the true color of the merchandise. There should be a consistent level of brightness throughout the store, yet enough variation to create focal points directing customers' eyes to certain areas. Retailers should move away from the bland, industrial lighting of the '80s to a softer-edged, bathed-in-light look for the future.

Most importantly, make sure the lighting at your design counter is chosen carefully.

Know Thy Customer

To build a strong identity, retailers must have an intimate knowledge of their customer base and know how

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to meet or exceed expectations. For example, retailers who understand their customers' shopping preferences and patterns can provide services to raise the store's performance level.

Consumers are spending less time shopping today. According to the new Consumer Pulse Survey by Kurt Salmon Associates, shoppers spent only three hours a month (or 45 minutes a

week) shopping in 1996, down 1.3 hours a month from 1995. Even with the convenience of home shopping, these types of purchases decreased by 19 percent in 1995.

However, while most consumers feel they have less time for shopping, they still value service. It's also becoming more difficult to attract sales associates due to the labor shortage. That's

why it's imperative for retailers to place a greater emphasis on training the associates they have about the merchandise they sell and providing value-added services for customers; send notes and call customers to let them know about upcoming sales or the arrival of new merchandise.

Make Visuals Matter

Visual displays were used heavily between the '50s and '70s. In the '80s, however, many retailers removed their displays to create austere industrial-type environments. In the coming years, retailers will need to strike a balance, providing an uncrowded shopping atmosphere while featuring strategically placed visuals throughout the store.

Seasonal visuals are also useful. Many props can be used for 30-, 60- or 90-day periods. For example, it's simple to liven up a store with red hearts around Valentine's Day, beach balls and towels during summer months, or wreaths and candy canes during the Christmas season.

Generating Return on Investment

While the amount of U.S. retail space per capita increased from eight square feet in 1972 to more than 18 square feet in 1993, sales per square foot have dropped from more than \$200 per square foot to just over \$120 per square foot. These numbers are proof that consumers are spending less at the retail site.

"Consumers are spending less money today than they did twenty years ago," Hope said. "For a retailer to carve out a niche within that fiercely competitive arena, they've got to prepare now with cutting-edge innovations." And so do you.

GlobalShop is produced by Shore-Varrone Inc.'s Display & Design Ideas. To receive more information, call 800-646-0091 or access Shore-Varrone's worldwide web site at <http://www.svi-atl.com>.