

Sell the Way They Buy



By Paul Schlossberg

The key to successful merchandising is to think like the customer. That's "customer," not "consumer." Consumers are statistics and customers are people. Successful retailers sell to customers, not consumers.

Just like real people, customers demand convenience. To sell better, you must think like those real people who are your customers.

For example, for many real people, time is more important than money. If you can get them what they want quickly, price will be less of an issue. So, for example, put as much in arm's reach as possible. Make it easy to buy it.

Want another radical idea? Price things in 25 cent increments so change becomes easier and lines move faster. Just add the tax into the price and don't fool around with multiple coins to make change.

Real people also want the familiar, which means recognizable brands. Do not focus on Joe Schlock brands. Focus on the brands you see outside, the brands your customers know.

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Normal human behavior traits can also help you sell more

For example, cold drinks come first when real people think of food and beverage. So make sure you're the first and best option for cold drinks. Then, make sure that before the customer gets to your cold drinks he gets to walk by other things you think he may impulsively decide to buy while he's there.

You should also plan to take advantage of unusual situations. Sure, you can't plan for a hurricane, but you can for a meeting or scheduled overtime. Overtime is a great time for selling convenience items.

You should also know who your customers are buying for. In the work environment, unlike at home, people tend to buy for themselves. Understand what it is that they want to get for themselves, so you can have it ready and waiting.

Snacking and meal delay is a big issue in workplaces. People make meal versus snack decisions all the time. They ask themselves, "When will I have my meal, and should I have a snack?"

Help them answer the question by having the right mix of product for your customer base. For example, a clientele heavy on kids should stock a lot of tart candies, while one with a lot of older women should be heavy on the chocolates.

Also have the right sizes. For adults, smaller single-serve packs are the norm. For teens and young adults, though, a two-liter bottle of soda can be a single serving.

There's another difference between worktime buying and at-home buying, and that's the value scale. A person's value scale is different in a work situation from when he or she is at home on the weekend looking for dinner.

People spend more on what they want than on what they need. At work, you tend to buy what you want since you buy for yourself. That's a great upsell, impulse sale and add-on sale environment, but only if you set the stage.

For example, if people are coming in for coffee, why not have brownies wrapped and ready to go

next to the coffee machine? How many brownies do you think you could sell that way?

Ice cream novelties are the world's champion impulse sale item. If you don't carry ice cream novelties right up front, you are certifiably insane.

What about other hot sellers? Single-serve milk? Coffee drinks? Nachos? Nachos are one of those great foods adults feel safe playing with, as if they were kids.

Think about a "Total Convenience Program" including your convenience store, vending, and what you sell in your foodservice operations. It's cold beverages, candy and snacks, food, and ice cream (and lots more if you're creative). This is about getting the customers to hand over their money into your POS.

Finally, make your customers passionate about what you do. If you can get them to say, "Gee I just had a great meal at the vending machine!" you've succeeded.

You laugh? This is about generating repeat business. If customers like how you deliver value and convenience, they'll vote with their money again and again for what you're selling.

This is sociology at work: people tend to be passionate about anything having to do with food. You can make it work for you. Your customers will love it. It will have a big impact on your bottom line.

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