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INTERVIEW: GUIDING CUSTOMERS FROM THE SHOWCASE WINDOW THROUGH THE SHOP-ENTRANCE TO THE CASHIER'S AREA

What is to be done so the communication chain won't break and all the communication efforts guide the customer in a consistent line towards the POS, especially if the products are spread over several floors?



Iris Skowronek

This second part of the interview with the partners Mrs. Reichelt and Mrs. Skowronek of the sales-consultant company "V wie verkaufen" (that means "s like selling") is about well-directed customer guidance.

Mrs. Skowronek, in the first part of this interview-series we looked at the average stay of a consumer in a shop in detail. But to get a consumer to stay in a shop, we have to invite them in first. Are there some basic facts that have a greater influence in retail today?

Mrs. Skowronek: "Retail is much more differentiated today. Strategic and operative management, cooperations, the Internet, and more and more chain stores. An additional fact is that the part of retail in private consumption is on a continuous decline. And a multitude of trends takes influence on the consumer behavior and changes the way people shop."

How does the changed consumer behavior translate into our day-to-day business?

"Consumers today look for emotion, change and individuality. At the same time there is a growing desire for orientation, simplification and trust. An appealing design of the shops and a good staged presentation of goods are more and more deciding factors in competition. The consumers are choosy. More and more often not the pricing is the deciding factor but the "undertow" or attraction of a shop act as added values on the sale of a product. Especially in fashion shopping becomes more of an expression of one's personal lifestyle. The goal is to create a "sales-atmosphere", which caters to all the senses of the consumer and stimulates a desire for the product."

Let's take a look at the shop itself. To know about the consumer is one thing, but how can I as a retailer create a workable strategy for my company from that knowledge?

"The dialog with the customer should not stall or be interrupted throughout the visit, since customer retention is the difference between the customers

expectation and the perceived service. But for this it is of major importance to understand the motivational structure of one's customers. The age and also the sex of the customer bear a major influence on her/his motivations. What works fine and is the best and most positive stimulant for one might produce nothing but insecurities and produce awkward feelings with others. Or to transfer this to the shop-floor: what the one finds very interesting and gets totally excited about, the other finds rather boring and a third passes it by without even noticing.

Define the sales-floor as a stage. Create a production of experiences and a life-style environment or an environment of several topics. But get off the idea to offer all, and at once! Structured life-style environments with a very focused but limited choice create space. Who doesn't like to be seduced, as long as it feels good?"

But consumers today suffer already from the fact that they receive too much information in too little time. By this the perception of any single information decreases significantly.

"Yes, this is correct, but the brain of the consumers has long since learned to handle this surplus of information. It just switches off, without any emotional involvement – Information Overload – but a lot of people haven't realized this yet.

Who still thinks that her/his communication is THE special one, and misses to create a one hundred percent accord with her/his shop-floor, will be left behind and will not be able to survive the next and coming years.

Ever more consumers are looking for shops and products or services that help them make a certain decision, like some kind of "pre-selection" – less is more, especially in retail. What once wasn't a problem, to guide the customer through the whole shop to present the whole product range, is becoming more and more a big challenge for retail today. Cost saving processes lead to less sales personnel on the shop-floor and customers have the choice between more shops carrying similar or even the same products."

Now we certainly hope that the consumer will have a choice between many retailers and shops in the future.

"The more is the importance a good presented customer guidance gains in the future. A "customers way-guide", which repeatedly addresses the same emotion of the consumer throughout her/his path through the shop and by this has a positive influence on the purchase behavior. Since a) everything that doesn't trigger an emotion is "useless" for the brain and b) less brain-energy or attentiveness is "wasted" searching, which leaves more room for the products.

A good "customers way-guide" can be achieved in several ways, through different media and messages. But of overall importance is that the visual communication, color and fragrance stimulants, packaging and acoustics harmonize and are well coordinated. Only a holistic and optimal coordinated

overall-script of the presentation tools will be successful in the end. Only through this all the sensitive systems of the consumer can be addressed and you can increase the possibility to achieve that special "feel-good" effect they so much desire."

What is in your opinion the best way to realize this?

"Most important is the continuity of the messages, beginning on the outside of the shop front, through the show-case windows and all floors until the cashier's point. In shop-fitting and product placement every little detail counts. To achieve a positive addressing of vision, hearing and smell through an atmospheric shop-design is the main target here.

But this will only work if you created a working base of the classic facts beforehand, like:

- Consideration of the natural way a customer moves through a shop, against the clock.
- The speed s/he walks from fast to slow to fast.
- The dislike of corners in shops and
- Hidden passages onto other floors / levels.

Everything else will most probably not create the increase in turnover you are hoping to achieve."

Are these considerations and the involved investment are really worth it, as seen by the customer?

"The consumer feels intuitively if a member of the orchestra plays "out of tune". If freshness, airiness, light colors and warmth suggest the coming of spring and in the background heavy disco-beats hammer away, if s/he is hampered by small passages or tight product placement in her/his natural walking speed or line of sight. Or if new fashionable colors suggest the smell and feeling of nature and the outdoors, but the shop-lighting is kept cold and dull. Customers feel this, unconsciously. And unconsciously they abandon the purchase.

Create emphases and leave enough walk space. Create a "customers way-guide" that will route through all the displayed product range. Customers expect not quantity, but quality when visiting a retailer. And most important: use the "arena" principle in product placement; always create a new, accentuated focus for the customer's eyes. Try to break up the "scanning" process of the shop."

Please be so nice to provide us with some examples.

"Communicate through pictures, the so called visual-supported product placement strategy. And it doesn't make a difference if you prefer static or moving pictures. We could not prove a bigger emotional reaction to either one of them. But favor realistic pictures. And depending if you are selling men's or women's clothing: for men it's still true – sex sells – for women we

saw pictures, for example, with kids workout better. But plain pictures of products should be a "no go" in this case, since they seem not to trigger any emotions.

Sell and guide through light. Light, music and fragrance allure people and have a direct influence on their feelings. Illumination can influence moods, and present sections of the shop in a "completely different light". Indirect lighting and general lighting can play with the size of a shop. It can pull someone into the "inner workings" of the shop or suggest a direction. Spots play with the scene, change the dramatics of the product placement, set "highlights" and lure people towards a "stage".

With the choice of colors come some symbolic and psychological aspects that should be kept in consideration. They can signal not only industry and trade affiliation, but also price category and shop concept.

Music achieves its effect by influencing the senses through classical conditioning. A well-known piece of music simulates a spatial and timely "meeting" with the product, creates a mental connection and suggests to the customer to a positive judgment about the product. This concept shall communicate to the consumer on a multi-sensual level. But it has to fit the whole store-concept, as mentioned above.

Fragrance can increase the staying time in a shop, augments the disposition to buy and especially the willingness to spontaneous purchases. But independent of the aforementioned arguments, music and fragrance are "attractants" that will pull consumers by natural curiosity through the sales-floor and onto different levels. They ignite passion in the consumers."

A lot of suggestions for a fundamental concept for any shop. But what can be done if the physical structure of the shop cannot be changed and includes many notches and blind angles?

"Difficult zones are the so called transitional areas. Like an entrance to a department or from one department to the next. Leaving one world, diving into the next. Appeal to all the senses of the customer, to create enough interest for her/him to produce a fresh desire to enter this new world. This is the place for interesting, new products and top-sellers of the up-to-date program of this new department or life-style environment.

The shop atmosphere, which as a recurring theme can be found from the show-case window throughout the shop until the cashier's area, has a high importance to create a buying disposition with the customer. Easy of orientation, emotional appealing attractions, and a sequential activating and deactivating can augment the atmosphere and the buying disposition of the consumer significantly. The setup of the product placement and strategic points must be placed in a way to guide the costumer also into the blind angles and hidden stairs. By this you can turn a constructional disadvantage to your advantage. Surprise the customer and let her/him discover: wow, there are more, interesting things here. And if the way to these places was interesting and exciting, it is a MUST to place interesting products there. The

target is to suggest to the customer, this is a place worth coming to, this is where always the "hidden gems" can be found."

Mrs. Skowronek, a short conclusion.

"It is like in "real life": to attract visitors, the program needs to change once in a while; the product range needs to be displayed in a new and exciting way. This can be at the same place or a completely different place within the shop. Otherwise the brain of the customer switches to "autopilot", with all the known negative consequences for the retailer.

The expectations that are triggered through the shop-front and the entrance area should not only be fulfilled within the shop, but definitely topped.

The customers should be guided throughout the shop - through skilled staging of the products, through catering to all her/his senses.

Create fascination and focus points for the customer's eyes throughout the shop, and use them to guide her/him.

Product range and shop fitting as well as design should go conform to the customer's expectation. S/he perceives this as a unit. Show your competency in style. Shopping becomes ever more sensual.

The environment must be adjusted to the products offered. Light and friendly colors should dominate; dark, strong colors should only be used for accentuation.

On all the spaces dedicated to impulsive purchases you can mix colors and use even an eccentric approach, but the surroundings should fit in color and be "calm".

Mrs. Skowronek, we thank you for this interview.

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