

The Power Within One

For the December issue of CSP I wrote a column titled “The Power of One.” The basic tenet of the column is the premise that each operating retail facility must instinctually serve each trade area as the distinct entity that it is. From that column sprung the idea of this month’s column: continuing CSP’s examination of the concept of relevance.

Webster’s Dictionary defines “relevance” as “having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand; affording evidence tending to prove or disprove the matter at issue or under discussion.” With that definition in mind, ensuring that our individual retail facilities remain relevant to our customers is of paramount importance if our stores are to succeed and prosper. Being convenient is important in establishing potential viability of a location; however, it is not convenience that creates a patron of our store, but the experience we create and deliver. It is the degree of relevance we have that establishes us as part of customers’ lifestyles and creates habitual behavior. This is why retailers need to maintain absolute operational flexibility within each location to properly respond to changing environments and shifting customer lifestyles.

Most certainly, we are in the midst of challenging times. During such periods, companies are often tempted to begin reducing costs at the core level of operations: the storefront. Now it is even more essential that attention be given to our stores and their daily operations. We must identify our real customers, know their wants and needs and serve those requirements in total, becoming experiential.

This can only be done on a store-by-store, trade-area-by-trade-area basis, referred to by some as “4 Walls Marketing,” “Neighborhood Marketing” or “Street Smart Merchandising” (a book I co-authored in 1987). No matter what the

term used in description, it is merely saying that we as retailers must constantly remain relevant to our customers.

Real-Life Examples

The best way to describe what remaining relevant is all about is to provide some examples of experience creation:

Espresso Express: The Washington store that every morning (rain or snow) brings out to the forecourt the specialty beverage cart; the barista comes to the pump. In the afternoon in warmer months, the “soda jerk” is on station.

Wine Extraordinaire: New Mexico wine, spirit and gourmet deli that not only has a teaching kitchen for food, but it also has a beverage-tasting room, and it combines on-site catering with event bartending.

Virginia Grandeur: Retailer that has morning “grandma hostess” at its specialty Dunkin’ Donuts self-service coffee bars in its stores. Grandma has that day’s “drink of choice” for all the regular patrons and assists where needed with “strangers” (really no such thing in these stores).

If Its Tuesday: Must mean it is “Senior Day” at this Arizona location, where each Tuesday morning the seniors get a designated discount on fuel purchase, which is pumped for them, and free drink of choice.

Daypart Mobility: A Gulf Coast store with a large customer base of contractor—skilled labor morning traffic that uses mobile displays to move up special HBC merchandise, including work gloves, sunblock, water, energy drinks, etc. In the afternoon, different displays are used for snacks and beverages, right up front.

Forecourt Follies: South Florida location that has “Peak Hour Hostesses” who assists patrons with dispensing fuel, and deliver in-store merchandise to their cars.

Rocky Mountain High: Store in a small Colorado mountain community that applied to get a post office for the community and integrated it into the store.

Such stories of relevance can also be told about select hotels, restaurants and other sectors of retail. No matter the economic cycle, each of our retail facilities has the opportunities and abilities to always remain relevant to our customers. ■



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