



**JIM FISHER** is the founder and CEO of Houston-based IMST Corp., a retail location analysis firm serving the convenience store/petroleum industries. He can be reached at [jfisher@imstcorp.com](mailto:jfisher@imstcorp.com).

## The Three R's of Store Vision

**F**or most of us, school days are a memory, and the three R's do not represent "reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic" anymore. Now they represent renew, refresh and restore—the level of attention we should give to the retail facilities in our industry. These three words represent myriad real and potential actions, requiring implementation schedules from daily to monthly, annually, twice a decade and beyond.

How do you react when you are approaching a restaurant and there is trash around the entrance? Or when you enter and the furniture is worn out, torn and tattered? Do you really want to see the kitchen?

What about when you go into a doctor's office that is outdated and cluttered with dated magazines? Do you get "warm fuzzies" about the level of care you are about to receive?

You start to get into a rental car that is still dirty from the previous rentals, and it has 39,000 miles on the odometer. Do you believe you are receiving real value for your dollars?

If your mind immediately moved to places you've been and experiences you have felt and they were not good, pleasant or enjoyable, you are most certainly not alone. Did you wonder: What makes me think that our customers do not experience the same feelings and perceptions when they are exposed to our stores? How do they feel when bags are placed over the dis-

penser handles because they are not operational? Or when the trash receptacles are overflowing? Towels, water and/or squeegees are missing from the stations on the islands? Restrooms are dirty and missing necessary supplies? A soda dispenser or coffee brewer is not operational?

### GET RID OF TUNNEL VISION

I am sure you feel the list could continue, because we have all experienced some of these moments. Is it true that neglect of our stores can transition into



neglect of our customers? If our customers are presented with old and tired stores, aren't our employees being given the very same environment?

We need to eliminate the tunnel vision that pervades so much of what we see, notice and recognize. We need to "refresh" the experiences we are offering our customers and employees. This can occur through simple actions such as ensuring crisp, clean and clear merchandising; consistency in colors, floor, walls and signage; and establishing a simple daily maintenance sched-

ule that employees adhere to.

"Renew" often requires evaluation of how the age of the facility limits its ability to adequately serve the customer base that exists in the trade area. All distinct profit centers (forecourt, store, foodservice, car wash, etc.) must be analyzed on an individual basis to ensure we are properly serving the marketplace with our quality of offering.

"Restore" is the most demanding of actions and requires the most arduous analysis process to fully understand the systemic changes that have occurred within the operational environment during the (now-extended) lifetime of the facility. Are we justified in a total raze-and-rebuild, or can we justify only a remodel and upgrade? And if it must be a remodel, then what are the various options available, and what is the return on each alternative?

It is difficult for any of us to be totally open to what we see and to what we experience. However, it's critical for us as retailers and operators to always have fresh eyes and a clear vision. We cannot provide to our customers what we want or like, or what we perceive as our customers wanting and liking. Responsibly (and successfully), we should provide only what our customers want and need. If we approach each facility every day with fresh eyes and renewed awareness, then what everybody else sees will be much clearer to us—and that is very refreshing. ■