

Winning new sales

PART TWO OF **STUART JACKSON'S** SERIES ON GETTING BACK TO BASICS.

Last month we looked at how to build a strong presence in a community by first creating a relevant and eye-catching shop front, and then by conveying the shop's health message to local residents.

Having achieved the proper external impact, let us move onto the inside of the shop and ensure that once a new customer has been enticed inside, a poor shopping experience does not lose them forever. Take a walk around your store with these headlines in mind.

CLEANLINESS

There are two first impressions a customer receives when they enter a shop and one of those is cleanliness. If a food shop does not present a sparkling image it will turn new shoppers off. The problem occurs chiefly because owner/operator retailers spend so long in the business environment that they can lose sight of just how untidy a shop can become.

Someone walking in for the first time, however, will have a very judgemental attitude. Fridges and bread displays are usually the worst culprits along with long uncleaned shelves and general clutter at the checkouts. Light the store well so that it is bright throughout and establish a clear floor policy: no boxes, litter, stock or bags allowed to be left anywhere in the front shop and ensure that any view to the storeroom is kept clean or concealed.

PRODUCT LAYOUT

The second early impression is of the stock. A customer either experiences a notion of abundance or an impression of staleness and product poverty brought home by a limp offering of tired and sparsely displayed lines.

Take a look at the shop from a position at the entrance door – the shelves should be packed with merchandise and items should be pulled forward, faced up and with no gaps showing. Use every inch of retail space; sales per square foot performance is crucial to the business's



future profitability. The operating costs that are being paid to run the shop are the same whether it's "air" or goods being retailed.

In addition to a plentiful offering, goods should be merchandised in a manner that reflects modern consumer shopping habits. Refer to last December's feature for the full picture on this, but to convey a few headlines again: today's healthy shopping market is all about a lifestyle choice so a retailer's community image needs to reflect this more up-market, quality perception.

Consumers are brand loyal and shop within categories of product that have been promoted in the media. These currently include beverages, cereals, baby foods, eco friendly household items, snacks and all types of bodycare. Lay out the shop in these popular categories and brand-block merchandise within each. Add clear signage to guide the customer and include a few of your own shop's brand name to boost local image.

Another occasional mistake is to utilise a shop design that allocates too much shelf space behind checkouts or deli-counters. The UK consumer is a nervous and polite shopper who will rarely ask to see items that are behind a counter; it is dead space!

THE INTERNAL MESSAGE

Some shops try to be all things to all people, offering other market products

such as gifts or speciality fine foods. This approach frequently stems from anxiety that a poor location or small population may make it impossible for a health food store to thrive without diversifying. Unfortunately, the real result is a "community" store that has no sense of purpose and alienates the very people it hopes to help. A health food shop must be one hundred percent committed to the cause.

Another familiar negative is when a retailer, to the detriment of sales, over-imposes their personal ethics on the shop. Many of us began in this industry out of a personal commitment to good nutrition or because of distaste for the corporate business world. Driven by such ethics, we can all too easily forget that in order to survive we have to make at least a few commercial and consumer concessions.

It is all very well to stock only the products that pass one's own inspection or to purchase from suppliers that meet our personal approval, but if the shop ends up full of goods that the consumer doesn't want, the business will fail and with that the ability to help. A balance between what the consumer desires and what the retailer wants must be sought.

Wall space in a shop is valuable if used to communicate positive marketing messages about your shop's goals, commitments, services, offers and ethos.

Don't waste it displaying an unruly mix of posters delivered by suppliers; they rarely convey anything clear to a new shopper.

PROMOTIONS

Cost and simplicity drive our suppliers to focus on promotions that discount products. Unluckily our customers prefer "banded", "linked" or "buy one get one free" deals so wherever possible seek these out. Presentation of promotions is central; if the customer does not understand the deal, it will not be taken up.

Discounting sends a fear message to the consumer – what's wrong with the product? Are they leftovers that no one else wants? This makes clear signage of the offer's goal crucial to alleviating these purchasing fears. Always give the promotion a theme such as "new product introduction deal", or "winter pick me up". Use any premise that is relevant and which gives the customer a positive message before they have time to create their own negative version.

This is equally true when discounting products that are short dated or not selling. Call them "end of lines" or "stocktake clearance" but never ever just price mark them down without explanation.

THE TEAM

We are all different; some of us prefer to work on our own at a PC in virtual darkness while others need to be in permanent people contact to thrive. When employing sales floor staff, look for smiley, bubbly people types that will not hide from the customer. For logistical needs such as ordering, employ an opposite personality type and if expecting a "jack of all trades", that's what you will get in performance too.

Encourage staff to be friendly, to speak to customers, learn their first names, talk about their life and the shop will benefit from a loyal purchasing customer base.

Look for staff that are studying alternative medicine or living the life, and encourage them to do more courses,

SUMMARY

The inside of the shop has to be user friendly. When was the last time that you shopped in your store as a customer rather than an owner? Have you ever looked at how your store performs in the way you look at others? If not, do it now and for the benefit of sales, make the changes suggested here.

perhaps with supplier support. Talk to the Health Food Institute on 0115 941 4188 or enquiries@healthfoodinstitute.org.uk for independent training courses in health and nutrition.



If you have any questions for Talking Shop or would like further information on Stuart Jackson's consultancy service, contact him on 0131 315 0303 or email stuart@forceofnature.co.uk or visit www.forceofnature.co.uk