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Summer 2015

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The good, the bad and the ugly



by Rich Porayko

Showrooms can be a four-letter word, but if you deal with B2C, they are a necessary evil. When you see a new small business open, you can often tell whether or not they are going to make it just by how much time, effort and detail they put into their store. First impressions mean everything and if a business's storefront or window display aren't appealing, less people will shop there and the chance of the business failing rises.

For new showroom builds, meet with a consultant early and often. For existing locations, consider the five senses.

First, sight. Transparency is Apple's mantra when designing a store, however they take sight lines to a whole new level. Consider track lighting to highlight product and signage. Even better, but not always feasible: daylight. Natural light provides us with a balanced spectrum of colour. Daylight affects people in numerous ways. Being in the fenestration business, skylights and clerestory windows would be an obvious choice. Walmart claims that all else being equal, stores with skylights sell more product than stores without. Staff dress codes or even uniforms can look very professional. QR tags can quickly direct a customer to watch videos or find more information online via their smartphone. If you are a distributor or re-seller, tap your suppliers for support including displays and banners. Kiosks are effective, compact and quite often free.

Next, touch: opening, closing, sliding, locking and feeling. The sense of touch cannot be overemphasized. Let customers feel the textured side of patterned glass. Ensure everything is in good operating condition and most importantly, safe. Families often have young children with them and toddlers can get into all sorts of spaces you never imagined they could. Calls to the fire department to rescue a trapped child are generally not good for business.

Yes, consider smell. Nothing demonstrates the advantages of an operable window like clean, fresh air. Build your product in the storefront or façade of the building and demonstrate the benefits of an operable window. B.O., smelly washrooms and overly

strong fragrances are best avoided. Rona serves popcorn for a few different reasons, scent being one of them.

Even taste can help you sell. A candy dish is a wonderful thing. Branded water bottles are inexpensive. So are single-serve coffee makers. Professional car salespeople swear by free coffee because they know they will have a captive audience for five to 10 minutes.

Finally, think about sound. Music is proven to enhance the customer experience. It reduces the echo of a showroom by serving as white noise. According to Monte Weise of *Canadian Auto Dealer* magazine, a recent car dealer tested the music theory by alternating days with music and days without. Weiss reported the results were clear. There was a measurable increase on days that music played and staff found music to be very positive and contributed to the overall enjoyment of the working environment.

Most window companies have a showroom on site in tandem with their manufacturing operation, (where the real estate is cheap), however more aggressive players are setting up showrooms in high-traffic consumer areas – driving walk-in traffic and expanding their market.

Getting people to notice your store is another topic altogether, but it doesn't have to get expensive or be a wacky waving inflatable arm flailing tube man, although those are pretty cool. Sandwich boards, lawn signs and removable letter signs are all reasonable and they get noticed. Plus they should keep you off the radar of your local municipal bylaw officer who can make getting a real sign for your business much more complicated than it needs to be.

When planning your showroom, think like the big boxes and other masters of retail do. Location and profit per square foot. With the exception of loss leaders and specials, more highly profitable products should have more and better real estate than commodity items. Keep it fresh. Experiment with different vignettes. Hang onto what works and change away what doesn't.

This really only scratches the surface. Proud of your showroom? We'd would love to see it. Please send photos to richp@constructioncreative.com.