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The In-Store Experience: Killer Opportunity for Competitive Advantage / "Price is not a long-term strategy"

Riger Staff

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Here in the U.S., and in some places overseas, retailers tend to flock together in malls and strips. With that comes some convenience for shoppers (and maybe less work for store site location managers). But, when there is a sameness to the stores, as consumers often complain — a sameness or me-too-ness in the frontage, in the structures, in the signage, in the merchandising, and even in the help — there is confusion and lost opportunities for the merchant to "connect" with the customer and "bring-'em-back-for-more."

Countering this trend, BassPros, the 22-store sporting goods retailer (they opened an 85,000 sq. ft. store in Central New York's Fingerlakes Mall, Auburn, NY, in June 2004) has mounted an assault on sameness. The strategy? Providing a one-of-a-kind retail experience that doesn't just generate sales, but generates passionate customer enthusiasm.

In an interview with the Syracuse Post-Standard, BassPros president Jim Hagale commented that the U.S. has become saturated with nondescript

retail stores, where merchandise has become "commoditized."



At BassPros, "we're not replicating gray boxes," said Hagale. "We're not replicating merchandise assortments. Lots of people sell sporting goods. In many retail venues, sporting goods become commoditized.

When something becomes a commodity, it's only price that matters. Price is not a long-term strategy."

Each BassPros store, according to the Post Standard, is unique to the region where it is — part museum, part education center, part conservation-action center.

In describing how BassPros tries to be different in how they market boats, for example, Hagale noted, "Most boat sales environments are not very attractive or comfortable to women. Our boat showrooms are much more like a dealership, a Lexus, Mercedes, or BMW dealership. These showrooms are an important part of why women come to our stores."

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(Editor's note: You didn't know women bought bass boats, you say? For those not up on how women decide, or at least influence, the purchase in nearly every product category, go to [TBD](#)).

Hagale said BassPros relies heavily on word-of-mouth in its store-launch strategy. The danger, he said, is that it greatly heightens expectations of first-time shoppers.

"When a customer comes into our store who we've never seen before, we can't simply meet their expectations. We have to wildly exceed them. If we don't blow them off their feet, we fail."

Other stores are in the works in Pennsylvania, Canada and Las Vegas, but also in Buffalo, NY. How will the Fingerlakes Mall store, just 150 miles down the road from the Buffalo location, differ from its Western NY BassPros cousin?

Each store reflects the regional environment it is in, said Hagale. BassPros stores will complement one another, but not cannibalize one another.

"Our customers are passionate about these outdoor activities. They're well-versed in the product, well-versed in sports. We can't fool them. And we don't even want to fool them."

Sounds like a "man-with-a-plan" to compete!