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ADVERTISING



Getting back to retailing basics

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As many retailers bemoan the tough economy, a recent TIME Magazine article says some slumps are self-inflicted.

Herewith, TIME's Strategy for Retailers Struggling in a Slack Economy:



about who might use it. When shoppers see their lives reflected there, the products feel relevant and useful. And, the customer "connects" with the store, the store's merchandise and the store's brand. (Also see the ["The In-Store Experience: Killer Opportunity for Competitive Advantage"](#) on our Web site.)

1. "Don't let your ads write a check your stores cannot cash."

That's TIME writer Bill Barol's way of saying, "match your walk to your talk." Your ads should not create an expectation that your in-store experience cannot back up. In fact, your store (and the in-store experience) is your message.

2. Let it flow

Appealing inventory is only as good as a store layout that allows customers to navigate through it and find what they want. Don't let merchandising and point-of-purchase marketing become lost arts at your place of business.

3. Tell me a story

Showrooms at Ikea, for example, do more than display the furniture. They tell a convincing story

4. Smile, help, or get out of the way


Intent on cutting costs to maintain low prices, some retailers skimp on payroll and employee training. Result? Too often, this means store personnel who cannot answer questions about merchandise, who do not extend themselves to provide help, and who do not make visitors feel welcome and glad they came. Or, sometimes, the drive for thrift leads to "self-help" and no "human touch" at all!

5. Use technology for me, not just for you

Customer relationship management software (CRM) is the rage, but, good as it may be for the merchant, ultimately, it does not do anything tangible for the customer. Harnessing technology to help customers search your total inventory of

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merchandise does provide that tangible benefit, however. Or using technology to expedite exchanges, to cite another example. (Also see [“Customer service: building bridges instead of walls”](#) on our Web site.)

6. Take the money

Don't underestimate the checkout line. “If you are going to mess up your in-store experience, don't mess it up at your checkout,” cautioned one consultant interviewed by TIME's Barol.

How to make it move more efficiently for the customer? Or, how to make sure the exiting customer is thanked? Part of the answer lies with new technology. Part of it lies with the attitude of your personnel. And finally, some of it lies with proper prior planning by YOU. Little things count for a lot. Don't take them for granted.

While these tips apply primarily to retailing, you can see readily where many of them are relevant to virtually any type of business.