

On Site. Insight.



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Founded in 1889, Modell's Sporting Goods is America's largest and oldest family-owned and operated sporting goods equipment, footwear and active apparel retailer with 145 stores along the East Coast.

This is two in a series of industry dialogues.

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How does in-store merchandising support your brand positioning and differentiate the shopping experience?

Modell's mission statement begins with the words, 'Listen, Respect and Respond' to customers, associates and vendors. So we take listening to the shopper very seriously through constant research and focus groups. One thing they'd been telling us recently was that there was too much visual clutter inside our stores... too many low-level signs and brands trying to tell different stories.

It was beginning to overshadow even our own Modell's messaging. For example, we have amazing community programs that support local organizations like youth soccer or Pop Warner with discounts and rebates that help them afford uniforms, equipment and even ball-fields. We've always highlighted these wonderful programs in-store, but lately, they'd gotten a little lost.

So when we scaled back on signage, widened the aisles for Moms with strollers, focused-in on really clean merchandise presentations and created smarter adjacencies for our customers, it also enabled us to visually re-emphasize our great community programs and give them the spotlight they deserve.

Do you look to vendors to provide merchandising innovation, and help support your brand strategies?

Absolutely. We believe that most of our vendors are in-tune with the customers who follow their brands, so we definitely always want to be sharing information, knowledge, and cross-pollinating ideas. We can always use help coming up with the best solutions for Modell's. This can manifest itself as anything from individual display techniques to merchandise presentations and layouts that optimize their brand within our store layout.

Which of your vendors do a particularly good job, and why do you feel that way?

We have a lot of amazing vendors who are experts in individual categories, so it's hard to single any one of them out. But anyone who visits us can see that, at the front of most Modell's stores, there are Under Armour and Nike displays. Yes, our branding hierarchy places the Modell's brand at the very top, and this helps us organize store navigation and wayfinding. But we also realize that customers do come to us for specific brands, and that has definitely affected positioning.

What can they do better to help you achieve your goals?

Walk our stores, talk to our customers and associates, and you'll better understand how we're organized. It's all about consistency of color and navigation on the Modell's side, and repetition of form among the various brands. Inside our 'Categorical Shops,' for example, we've coordinated the merchandising, by sport, for all apparel and accessories. But our customers also told us that, as they move from shop to shop, they want individual product and brand information to be communicated consistently. So we've installed red informational clipboard signs that are easy for customers to spot.

How do you evaluate innovation?

Obviously, over time, we put numbers and thresholds to any changes we make. But at the moment, we're focusing on customer feedback to the extent that we even re-interview folks from earlier focus groups. You should understand that our executive management team, starting with CEO Mitchell Modell himself, is very involved. They're in every store, talking to customers, spending one-on-one time with associates. In fact, people from every corner of Modell's have a huge say in the process.

