

Solving *for* Shoppers

Retailers and brand marketers are suffering from a disconnect about the very meaning of the term, “Shopper Marketing.” Yes, we all agree that it’s about in-store and the “first moment of truth.” But many have yet to realize that it’s the retailer — not the brand marketer — who is in charge.

Too many brand marketers are making the mistake of adopting the definition of Shopper Marketing offered by Deloitte & Touche: “All

marketing stimuli developed based on a deep understanding of shopper behavior designed to build *brand equity*, engage the shopper and lead him/her to purchase” (emphasis mine).

This is a flawed definition because it disregards the retailer as the key decision-maker. It also ignores the retailer’s key objective, which is to provide shopper solutions and drive sales by category, not by brand.

Retailers aren’t thinking about your brand’s equity; they care only about their shoppers and providing them with solutions — in health care, pet care, household, meals, entertainment. You name it.

The reality is, Shopper Marketing, done correctly, isn’t even about marketing in the conventional sense. Traditionally, marketing is mainly about communicating messages to consumers — mostly advertising of one kind or another.

At retail, the goal is not just to communicate *to* — it is to offer solutions *for* — shoppers. That’s what helps shoppers have a more satisfying shopping experience. Interrupting them with ads usually has just the opposite effect because it tends to *slow them down* instead of *help them out*.

So, the objective of Shopper Marketing really is not about traditional *marketing* at all. It is about delivering shopper *solutions*. And that’s a very different objective. We need to stop treating shoppers

as if they are consumers in search of brands. They are not. They are shoppers in search of solutions.

THE WAL-MART BLUES

Retailers certainly understand this, most notably Wal-Mart. Anyone who has spoken with the merchandising and marketing teams at Wal-Mart lately knows that their directive to brands is to offer shopper solutions by category. Wal-Mart wants its suppliers to get together with each other as partners and come back with new and innovative ways to provide shoppers with better solutions. This is a radical shift.

In case its intentions are not clear, Wal-Mart has also issued a style guide that suggests displays conform to the Wal-Mart look and feel. If you come to them with a display idea that is not done up in Wal-Mart “blue,” you might find yourself taking it straight to the back and tossing it in their recycling bin.

This should come as no shock to anyone who has been following the power shift to retailers — from Wal-Mart on down — over the past decade or more. Retailers have been chasing a “solutions” approach for quite some time now, utilizing their real estate to build their brands. They’ve also become far more demanding when it comes to the kinds of merchandising they will accept.

The difference is, the days of thinking of our brands in isolation at retail are ending — in fact, we might as well assume those days are over. If Wal-Mart is now saying that it wants brands to collaborate to create solutions — which it will present in Wal-Mart branded displays — then you can be sure that the rest of the retail industry is not far behind.

ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS

Working with Wal-Mart, or any other retailer, means viewing our brands from *their* perspective. Ultimately, that means viewing our brands in the context of their point-of-difference — that is, from the shopper’s perspective.

If your brand is not part of a shopper solution, you’ve got a problem.

The implications of this are huge. It means we have to start thinking about our brands as solutions, as such, and how they relate to brands made by other manufacturers. We need to dig in and really understand how shoppers view our brands in combination with related products—how they might combine and recombine our brands to come up with a total solution.

We need to become *solutions engineers*. For example, you're thinking about cough/cold, then maybe you've got Purell hand sanitizer and Kleenex tissues and NyQuil bundled nicely in a single display. That would be a real service to shoppers who rarely keep a stash of cold-care items in the bathroom. Usually, when we're sick we go out and buy them, and are in no mood to navigate the entire store to find all the products we need.

In some cases, the retailer may orchestrate this type of total-solution delivery. But if Wal-Mart is setting the standard, we can expect that they and other retailers will want us to come to them with ideas. The idea of brands working together in this way will have its complications, but such complications obviously pale by comparison to the prospect of losing the exposure opportunity at Wal-Mart or anywhere else.

It is possible that some brands may be able to provide solutions on their own. Back-to-school meal solutions probably could be handled by a number of companies as a single brand. Diabetes oral-care could be handled by several manufacturers within their own portfolios, for example. But by and large it is a brand new day and one that calls not only for collaboration with retailers but also with other brands.

ADJACENCIES, INSIGHTS & INVESTMENTS

Understanding adjacencies at retail is a major part of this, because adjacencies can drive solutions. Sometimes a very simple, but insightful placement can yield a remarkable result. For example, one major brand put a display of its antibacterial soap in the pet-food aisle and drove sales substantially. Apparently people associate pet care with dirty hands.

This points directly at another imperative—we need to invest more heavily in research that provides the kind of shopper insights required to arrive at the most complete and compelling solutions.

It is absolutely essential that we invest in tools that can tell us who lives in each store's trading area and what their problems might be so that we can offer them relevant solutions and build our merchandising

plans accordingly. Is there a high incidence of heart issues? Diabetes? Seniors? Families with young children? Pets? We need to know so we know how to help them when they go shopping.

We also need to know so we don't waste resources. Suppose you're planning a national introduction and you expect to put the same materials in every store. Say that in a best-case scenario, you might get 70 percent compliance—you'll be wasting hundreds of thousands of dollars (not to mention the environmental impact).

SPEAKING WITH SHOPPERS

But if we do our homework and can target just the right stores with just the right solutions, we'll drive growth and save money. And, by the way, that homework also includes boning up on how to communicate effectively to shoppers. The most common mistake is simply transferring the creative from television commercials to in-store media.

While it's obviously important to keep a brand's identity consistent, it's equally important to keep it coherent. Too many times, displays assume that the shopper remembers your advertising. Even if recall is at a healthy level today—say, 25 percent—that means 75 percent of shoppers might have no idea what your slogan or tagline means.

A brand marketer would no more consider putting an ad on television without research to prove it works than jump out of the Empire State Building. And yet, they will spend a lot more money putting a display in store without testing it. That's just wrong and has to change.

Shopper Marketing is not about individual brands—it's not even about marketing in the usual sense. It's about communicating in a way that shoppers understand and appreciate, because it helps them find a solution to their needs and get the most out of their shopping trips.

The good news is, the result is increased category sales, increased basket load—and growth for your brand. ■



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