

Selling in a Retail Environment

The bustle of the retail environment, as shoppers peruse merchandise and retailers engage in a variety of tactics to influence shopper behavior, is a core engine in our economy and a critical sales channel for a wide variety of manufacturers. Certainly the economic dynamics would change dramatically without retailers. For example, it is now understood that the WalMart factor changed the face of retailing, causing changes in merchandising, logistics, distribution and other operation elements. Moreover, WalMart caused significant changes in the placement of retail outlets, and the ability of independent retailers to survive. Call it Tudog to the rescue, because in this article we present the selling secrets of mega-retailers so that smaller retails can adapt and adjust.

The selling to consumers that enter a retail outlet is comprised of 5 stages, each of which is to be executed with a smile and a sense of service. The sale of merchandise cannot be achieved if the customer feels either pressured or uncomfortable. The consumer has to view the salesperson as a friend, someone who is there to help the customer find whatever he/she needs to satisfy his/her purpose for entering the store. The job of the salesperson is to make certain that the person finds what he/she was looking for and makes the purchase. The level of comfort the buyer feels with the salesperson the better the chance the purchase will be made. Additionally, the easing of the customer to a more expensive product, or additional products, is a function of not only customer comfort, but also the level of expertise and command over the products that the salesperson demonstrates. Customers will trust a salesperson recommending a superior product if in fact the customer finds both credibility and relevancy in what the salesperson is saying.

With this background in mind, let us explore the 5 stages of retail sales:

1. Welcome

Make sure you greet every person coming into the store. Some large retailers actually hire people they call "greeters" whose job it is to stand by the door and say hello to everyone who enters. While the idea behind a greeter is correct, the cumulative effect of having someone dedicated to the task can be seem as somewhat disingenuous by the buying public. After a while the greeter becomes invisible. The task of saying hello, particularly in smaller retail stores, is that of the on floor sales force. Every customer entering the store should be approached by a sales person and greeted. This lets the person know that service is a priority and that their entering the store is appreciated and seen as an opportunity to provide assistance.

2. Qualify

Some customers come into a store to browse, some to explore and learn, and some to buy a very specific product. In order to deliver proper service and maximize the potential of each customer, you need to understand what their objectives are and how you can help them achieve them. This might include asking the customer how you can be of service, but also include an effort to "sum up" the customer and understand where the boundaries of selling to this person may lie. The qualifying stage allows you to recognize the scope of your actions in the next stage, which is where the creative convincing takes place.

3. Demonstrate

The demonstration phase does not necessarily require that the salesperson show the customer the product in action, but rather refers to the process through which the salesperson shows and discusses the product with the customer. In some cases a customer may be extremely specific in his/her request, asking for a particular product. In other cases the customer may only know the type of product he/she wants and will rely on the choices available, the prices, and the recommendations of the sales force in making a buying decision. There are also times when the customer has no real understanding of need or desire but rather is in a shopping mood and seeking to discover products that meet his/her fancy. In all these scenarios, the skill of the salesperson in demonstrating what is available and guiding the customer to the product that most suits their wishes, is essential in the completion of a sale.

4. Construct

Once you have helped the customer determine what he/she wants to buy, you can begin to construct the purchase, meaning you can begin to offer all the ancillary products the person may need to complete their purchase. For example, many products require batteries, or carry bags, or additional capacity. By constructing additional purchases onto the initial buy you are able to maximize the buying potential of the customer.

5. Close

Like every deal, the sale of merchandise in a retail environment is only completed once the deal has been closed, which in this case means the purchase has been rung up and the cash register has gone “cling cling”. The closing of the sale is the most important part of the process not only because it is the point when the money gets transferred from buyer to seller, but also because up until that moment the customer has the option and opportunity to delay their buying decision. The task of the salesperson in bringing the consumer from the construct to close stages includes the limiting of the customers desire to avoid the final buy decision. This can be achieved by escorting the customer up to the cash register and congratulating them on their buy, Make sure, too, that you express your wishes that they enjoy the purchase and invite them to come by and see you anytime you can be of help.

Retail sales are as much a science as any other aspect of business, from Just in Time replenishment to merchandise placement. The need to approach it as a science and train sales staff as if it were a science becomes more and more necessary as the big box retailers develop and deploy sophisticated in-store sales tactics. These tactics, reviewed in detail in this article, are not beyond the means of the small retailer. All the small retailer needs is a will to adopt the tactics being used by the big retailers. While some might feel it will diminish their “small store” feel, Tudog would suggest that, when applied properly it will emphasize your small store, in the process exposing the vacancy of the intimate approach as practiced by the bigger stores.