

BY BRUCE SMITH

# INSIDE THE DOORS, HOW DOES YOUR STORE PERFORM?

In the last issue we discussed the store exterior. Now let's examine what happens after the customer has made that important decision to walk through your front door.

**W**e call the first 10 feet inside the store the "decompression zone." Here, your customer should shift gears and set aside the world outside. This is the point where they should be engaging with your brand, seeking out solutions to their needs and, ideally, expanding their shopping list as they encounter new products or remember forgotten items.

Your store's decompression zone is your chance to tell a story. What makes you different? What are you great at? How do you help a customer? If your store's brand is built on low prices, this is where you should promote sale items. If it is built on innovation, use the space to display new products. And if you have a large store, this is where your customers can find their way.



Your store's decompression zone is your chance to tell a story. What makes you different? What are you great at? How do you help a customer?

Once inside, your customer needs to find the merchandise that brought them to you in the first place. Gondolas and racking have become the industry standard here for good reason — they work. It is important that they be accessible and easy to shop. This is best achieved by minimizing stockouts and keeping products orderly.

To more thoroughly engage your customer, you should take advantage of displays such as risers and end caps that promote and inform. Using seasonal or project-oriented themes will drive sales.

Certain categories deserve unusual fixtures. For example, tables and chairs make

good sense in paint stores because customers aren't just buying products. They need time to find a design-related solution.

## MAKE SIGHTLINES WORK

Long sightlines at the point of entry make your store more inviting and draw customers inside. Depending on the layout, a well-designed store will have a power aisle that can merchandise promotional sale items, or a racetrack-type "main street" that can engage your customer with innovative products.

We often refer to lighting as "the new paint." Once the domain of the fashion

industry, all sorts of retailers are using feature lighting to raise the profile of a product or product zone — and reduce energy costs. Ambient light levels entice customers to stay longer.

### JOURNEY'S END


It's the end of the customer's journey and last impressions count. A single checkout line serving all cashiers is the fastest for moving customers, but since that line can get long, customers may get the perception that they're in for a long wait. Slowly this perception is changing, however, as more and more major retailers, including Best Buy, Ikea, and Mountain Equipment Co-op, adopt it.

And, of course, a good store design will take advantage of the line-up area to continue to merchandise impulse products.

But avoid overdoing it. Cluttering the counter at checkout with cheap impulse

items can be a real annoyance when it interferes with the transaction. Yes, they offer incremental sales, but are key chains and mini-flashlights that important to your business?

Take time to walk through your store — and your competitors' stores — as if you are a customer. What messages do you get? How hard is it to find a product and pick it off the rack? Is the store dirty and, messy, or neat and tidy?

Most retailers can find areas of improvement during these "walkabouts" — and today's discerning customer will reward them with increased sales and return visits. 



*Bruce Smith of DMD Retail Design assists retailers by bringing design and business realities together to create great branded experiences.*

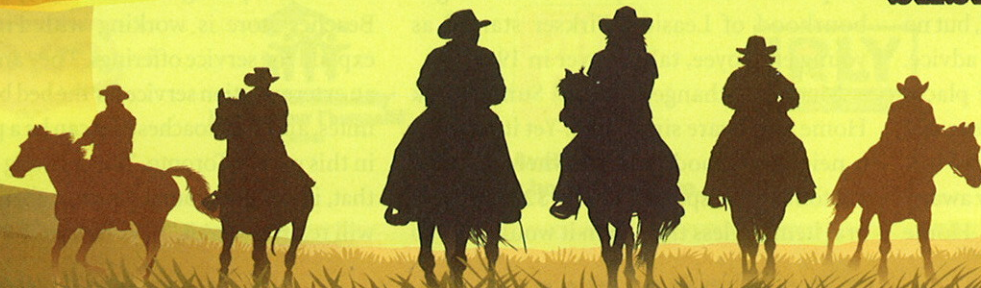
## DON'T MISUSE THE COMPRESSION ZONE

Too often retailers treat the entrance to their stores as a point of interception for items that are not core to the brand. For example, one large chain aggressively confronts its customers by attempting to sign them up for credit cards. Another places low margin clearance items in this prime piece of real estate. That may be a great idea if you are a liquidator or a discount merchandiser, but is it the right message for a knowledgeable specialist to send?

# THE WILD WEST AT ITS BEST

2012  
  
**SHOWCASE**  
 Buying Show & Convention

**JANUARY 19-20, 2012**  
**SASKATOON, SK**



[www.wrla.org/prairieshowcase](http://www.wrla.org/prairieshowcase)

WRLA Inc.  
 Email: [ckelly@wrla.org](mailto:ckelly@wrla.org)  
 or 800-661-0253 ext 3.