

the merchandising mindset

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IT USED TO BE HARD TO FIND FELLOW scrapbookers, but now it seems like there are scrapbook stores on almost every corner. This is one big reason for spending some time thinking about merchandising. There are many similarities between creating a beautiful scrapbook and engineering a useful product display fixture. Basically, each endeavor should effectively convey a message or story, not unlike the craft of scrapbooking. In addition, the key ingredient to achieving a successful outcome is the people involved in the process. Here are some thoughts on one of the hardest merchandising dilemmas posed to me by thousands of scrapbook business entrepreneurs and enthusiasts.

“CAN THOUGHTFUL MERCHANDISING REALLY AFFECT MY BOTTOM LINE?”

This is one my favorite questions because it must be answered properly (and understood) before any budgets can be allocated to store fixtures and product displays. Working with retailers and product manufacturers, I always try to take a very rational approach to the “science” of shopping, using research and past experience to shape my thinking. Then the five o’clock bell rings and I take off to do some personal



shopping and it seems all rational decision-making is out the window. I find myself buying products emotionally, based on how I feel at the time of purchase. Make no mistake: the retailer may be implementing a coherent merchandising strategy; however, it is hopefully invisible and speaking only to my subconscious.

This merchandising strategy was formed from a specific mindset: thinking not only as a business, but also as a consumer. Most likely, it is the result of numerous attempts and revisions—consumer feedback and focus groups. For example, Amazon.com sells an inconceivable amount of products; every time you select an item to purchase, they thoughtfully suggest some additional items that other consumers like you have expressed

interest in. Like an appealing scrapbook page, they are telling a story that speaks to you. When merchandising scrapbook products, there seems to be three prevailing methods to tell a story. You can merchandise by category, theme or brand; it should often be a combination of all three.

MERCHANDISING BY CATEGORY

This method is best applied to product categories that have similar product dimensions and are perceived by consumers as commodity items. Some examples would be paper, albums, pens or markers. Each of these items is approximately the same size and can be displayed within a single merchandising vehicle. In addition, because they are commodities or basics,

consumers want to see all that is available in one area to review quality and price. It allows consumers the ability to make a decision quickly and easily.

MERCHANDISING BY THEME

This method is more difficult because you must display a wide variety of products, all having different packaging dynamics, in one area. Select merchandising products that are modular and conform to standard store fixture materials such as slat wall and pegboard. My favorite term for this method of merchandising is “plug

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and play.” Paper must rest alongside stickers and embellishments, with coordinating stamps and albums within arm's reach. As scrapbooking continues to grow in popularity, many of the consumers entering your store will not have the expertise to find all these coordinating products unless they are displayed next to each other.

MERCHANDISING BY BRAND

In any industry there are market leaders. These are companies that have excelled in product quality, innovation and overall brand recognition. These companies usually have significant resources to market their products in numerous media outlets such as TV (i.e., DIY Networks or QVC), magazines, websites, event sponsorships, etc. In most cases, they are driving consumer traffic to your store so it is imperative that you have an area where you display these products. Many

of these companies will provide a product display or “center” so that you can easily reinforce the brand messages they have paid so handsomely for.

You've probably heard the saying “the eyes are the windows to the soul.” For merchandising, the eyes are also the way to the consumer's pocketbook. Visual merchandising is one of the easiest ways to appeal to your customer. Signs, for example, can be placed almost anywhere and offer another opportunity to draw attention to your products and reinforce your strongest brands. Try signs at the end of an aisle or hanging from the ceiling. Check with your suppliers and see if they offer signs or posters that you can use around your store. If not, you can always make your own, incorporating your products and craft expertise.

THE CONFLUENCE

As previously mentioned, these three strategies should cross over. You may have a product center featuring a strong “brand” and also offering additional products from this brand in your “category” or “theme” merchandise aisle, for example. In fact, most shoppers are emotionally involved in their purchases. The challenge, then, is to merchandise to their emotions, without, of course, being too obvious. We all know that display areas should be pleasing to look at and free of too much clutter. They also need to tell a story. Customers want to feel like they must make the product part of their life. That's when the products make it all the way to the checkout. Take some time to watch your customers as they make their way through the store. Where do they stop? How do they react to different locations and displays? This will tell you a lot about how to maintain a successful merchandising mindset.

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