

Forms of Involvement

Engaging customers with human contact also works well for retail stores. Human beings are naturally drawn to other human activity. The sight of other humans in motion attracts people . . . and increases sales. Studies show that the more contact employees make with customers, the greater the average sale. In fact, any contact initiated by a store employee increases the likelihood that a shopper will buy something. A shopper who talks to a salesperson and tries something on is twice as likely to buy as a shopper who does neither. Talking with an employee has a way of drawing a customer in closer and actively involving them.

Atmosphere

Another way to boost participation is with atmosphere. Atmosphere is really just a state of mind that you can create. Think about the following locations and the atmosphere they purposefully create:

- Hardware stores
- Malls
- Theme restaurants
- Sport stores
- Hospitals
- Book stores
- Casinos
- Amusement parks
- Bars
- Law offices

Each establishment is vastly different but when you walk in, you know immediately the atmosphere or feeling that it evokes. In this way, the atmosphere moves you. Antique stores purposefully create an atmosphere of chaos. They appear to be unorganized with everything strewn around or disheveled. This is so that customers believe they have stumbled upon a great find, a piece of buried treasure. Nike Town is a set of stores all with an athletic theme. If the customer is successfully seduced by the excitement and energy of the athletic atmosphere, he will want to make himself just a little worthier of it. This means buying a new pair of shoes.

Music

Music is an important part of atmosphere. In department stores, shoppers who are exposed to music shop 18% longer and make 17% more purchases than non-music stores. There are even rhythms, pitches, and styles of music that are best for different shoppers. Grocery shoppers respond best to slow tempos. Fast food restaurants need a higher number of beats per minute. For the use of music to be effective, customers can't really be aware of it – the music should not be overpowering, rather it should be merely an atmospheric presence.

Aroma

Aromas are commonly used as a participation device. We know that our sense of smell can evoke memories quicker (Law of Association) and more intensely than any other method. We see many examples of the use of aromas to create the proper atmosphere. Victoria's Secret uses potpourri scents to augment their customers feelings of femininity. Pizza stores use the smell of freshly baked pizza. Car dealers use the new car smell even

on used cars. In the Kajima Cooperation in Japan, management uses aromas to increase productivity throughout the day. Their formula is citrus in the morning, for its rousing effects, floral scents in the afternoon, to encourage concentration, and woodland scents before lunch and at the end of the day, to help relax employees. One study showed that people were more than twice as likely to provide a stranger with change for a dollar when they were within smelling range of a Cinnabon store. The right smells can make a complete atmosphere.

Atmosphere can also include the tension in the air. Is there a rush, or are customers relaxed? What type of climate are you trying to create? Do you want a quick, fast decision, or do you want your customers to feel comfortable enough to stay for a while? An interesting study on what happens when you create an atmosphere of being rushed can be seen in the following example.

Good Samaritan

Princeton University psychologists John Darley and Daniel Batson wanted to see how students would respond if they were in a situation replicating the biblical account of the Good Samaritan. As the story goes, a band of thieves beat, robbed, and left a man traveling alone by the roadside to die. A devout priest and a reputable Levite passed by. Neither of the men stopped to help the dying man. Finally, a Samaritan, loathed and despised by society, stopped to help him. The Samaritan bound up his wounds, took him to an inn, and even paid the innkeeper to care for him until he returned.

Darley and Batson asked seminarians on a one-on-one basis to prepare and present a short speech on an assigned biblical topic. The test was set up so that on their way to the location where they would deliver their speech, each student would cross a man slumped over, coughing and groaning. Which students would actually stop and help? Before preparing their speeches, the students filled out a questionnaire asking why they had chosen to study theology. Then a variety of speech topics were assigned, including the story of the Good Samaritan. As the students were leaving to deliver their speeches, some were told, "You'd better hurry. They were expecting you about three minutes ago." Others were told, "They won't be ready for a few minutes, but you may as well head over now."

Now, most people would surmise that seminarians stating on their questionnaires that they had chosen to study theology so they could help people and who were then assigned to speak on the Good Samaritan would be the ones most likely to stop and help the ailing man on their way. If you were one of the many who thought this, the actual results may surprise you. Interestingly, neither of those two factors seemed to make much of a difference. In fact, Darley and Batson stated, "Indeed, on several occasions, a seminary student going to give his talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan literally stepped over the victim as he hurried on his way." The element that seemed to be most influential was whether or not the student was rushed. Of the students who were told they were already a little late, only 10% stopped to help. Of the students who were told they had a little bit more time, 63% stopped to help. We can learn from this example that we can create

atmospheres where people are so involved and feel so much pressure to be sufficiently involved that they ignore other factors they normally would not.

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