

Design should not only look great,
but also make shoppers act.

Active Design

Retailing and design have long been associated together. We can all think great retail design concepts that have captured our imaginations.

However, changes in the marketing landscape are creating fresh challenges for retailers and brand owners. The design industry is ideally positioned to take advantage of these changes — but only if it gets out of its ivory tower and wakes up to the realities of shopping in the 21st century.

Few would dispute that the job of any designer is to capture the essence and values of any brand for which they are working, whether that be designing a piece of packaging or a whole environment.

But in a world where virtually every product category is suffering from brand proliferation and time-pressured shoppers are being enticed by ever more sophisticated retail offerings, effective design has to do more. It must work for the benefit of the shopper as well as the retailer and brand owner.

It has to sell *actively*.

By definition, the world's great retail environments are the result of great design thinking and execution. This has been most obvious in categories where the shopping experience is part of the brand experience (whether that be retailers themselves like Selfridges in London, Printemps in Paris, or brand owners like Prada and Ralph Lauren).

Our move into the “experience economy” has furthered this trend, with brands like Lego creating stores where young consumers can immerse themselves in the brand. As retailers seek to both differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive marketplace and build a deeper connection with their shoppers (beyond traditional attributes centered around price and value), we can see examples of a “branded experience” in previously more functional channels and categories, such as grocery and consumer electronics.

Target, Whole Foods and Trader Joe's are the obvious examples in U.S. mass and grocery retailing, but it's in the world of consumer electronics where we see the most compelling impact of effective design — the Apple Store. Apple has proved beyond argument that great retail design can build brands *and* drive sales.

Few would dispute the design aesthetics of an Apple store and that they are a great showcase (some would say *temple*) for Apple's Macs and iPods. In contrast to the “pile it high and watch it fly” philosophy of others, Apple stores focus on fewer than 20 products in an environment created from just three core materials — glass, stainless steel, and wood.

And yet, despite the naysayers' (“Sorry Steve, Here's Why Apple Stores Won't Work,” *BusinessWeek*, 2001), Apple's sales performance is staggering. According to a Sanford C. Bernstein report, its sales per square foot of around \$4,000 dwarf other big-

PACKAGING NEEDS TO:

1. Attract the shopper's attention. Unseen is unsold.
2. Offer information that is relevant to the decision-making needs of the shopper.
3. Where appropriate, engage them.
4. Close the sale. Get shoppers to put the brand in their baskets.
5. Recognize which design elements are directed to the shopper and those that aim to influence the consumer. Brands like Dr. Pepper must talk first to the shopper (mom) and secondly, but with equal effectiveness, to the (teen) consumer.

RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS NEED TO:

1. Help shoppers navigate the store and direct them quickly to the categories and brands they are primarily interested in.
2. Assist in decision-making at the fixture, providing just the right amount of information for any given category.
3. Present brand choices in a manner that reflects the shopper's needs and decision-making process.
4. Give shoppers more time to browse other categories where effective design can tempt them to make additional purchases.

ACTIVE DESIGNERS MUST ASK:

1. How and why do shoppers shop? For any segment or category, what are the different shopper missions and need states?
2. How do shoppers behave and process information in a busy environment when they are primarily in a functional behavioral mode? According to POPAI, supermarket shoppers are exposed to 1.6 pieces of in-store material every second. And yet less than one in five is noticed.
3. For brand owners, what constraints or opportunities are presented by the retailer? What are the unique needs of the big players? What role does secondary packaging play, for example?

name U.S. retailers. Best Buy manages around \$930 and Tiffany & Co., \$2,600, while a figure of \$600 is more the norm for retailing across all categories.

If we look a little deeper into the design of Apple stores from a shopper's perspective, we can identify some principles that have broad applicability:

- Products are easy to locate and grouped according to consumers' needs.
- Information is readily available from display materials and staff.
- When consumers want it, they can engage in the Apple experience—through hands-on testing, talking to staff members or visiting the Genius Bar.
- Less back room inventory due to the low number of SKUs.

However, do these insights have any applicability in the grocery and mass channels where an individual outlet may be carrying upwards of 20,000 SKUs?

The answer is a categorical *yes*. Design, whether it be environmental or packaging, should be used as it always has been—to deliver equity-building form and function. But modern retail design needs to do more. Faced with more choice and less time to choose, shoppers are looking both for guidance and inspiration—

sometimes within the same shopping trip.

Developing shopper-based solutions requires what I call *Active Design*—packaging and environments that not only look great and entice shoppers, but also make them act. Designers, with their expertise in the use of shape, form and color are ideally placed to capitalize on the increasing attention that brand manufacturers and retailers are placing on the shopper.

Success in the future will require drawing from disciplines that have been (and still are to a great extent) unlikely and unfamiliar bedfellows—design, trade and promotional marketing.

Some designers will struggle to integrate the “dirty” complications of a retail reality into their thinking. Others will embrace the new attention being focused on their work and the new insights that will drive design solutions that win equally well at the first and second moments of truth. ■



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