

Branding Your Store

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Liquor Store Association

Editor's Note: While this article was written prior to the holiday season, the concepts presented are applicable throughout the entire year.

Page 11 of this issue is devoted to advertising a product. It is a brain teaser which speaks volumes about how people get related to products and how their buying habits are influenced. No one denies the success of those phrases.

The purpose of that exercise was to make you think about branding - in this case, your store. I read with great interest many ads, looking for ways people set themselves apart and reach out to their customers. So many are copies of others. Many others have wasted space.

I have also visited stores, and cringe at the way the store is set up not to welcome the customer. We are not vending machines. We are retailers serving people, asking them to part with their money for a life-style purchase. They don't have to buy our products since they are not necessities of life. They don't have to be in our store, since there are many others within reach to which they can easily go.

Hence, we have to brand our store - make it have some similarity of purpose and service that will attract people to come, shop and buy. This is most important in this holiday season. Is your store well lighted? Is it clean and shiny? Are people directed within the store to various sections - liquors, cordials, wines by type or brand or country of origin? Are specials and sale items clearly and invitingly displayed? Are counter people presentable and polite and smiling? Is the customer always asked if anything else is needed, such as a cordial to go with a dinner wine, etc? Does your window attract people? Do you offer to wrap?

These are only a few things, and individually they are easy to do. Together they shout out your

commitment to service and accommodation. You make their shopping a pleasure.

Retailers have a penchant for dwelling on the price of something. That does have some value and there are some people who will expend inordinate efforts to cherry-pick for price. In this holiday season, though, pricing can't be everything. You will do approximately forty percent of your annual business - and it must be profitable! You have many new customers who have no real information on prices since they are looking for a gift. While you want to remain competitive, you also have to remain solvent, and even that is a low goal!

What we're trying to do is make you step back and look at your store. What

does it shout out to the passerby and a new customer? How inviting is it? How does it generate impulse sales? Is the customer your guest or your mark? Do you have a catchy theme/phrase/logo that will capture the customer's imagination?

The sum total of these is your brand, the way they remember you and are drawn to come back or repulsed, never to return. That brand has to be in your advertisements, your window and inside your store. Every employee must work to enhance it and protect it. Coupled with a good price that is profitable for you, you will have a satisfied customer who will return, and a great holiday season. You may even get your store's brand so well known that it will be in our next brain teaser!

