

frank talk

Competition today is creeping up all around the independent specialty retailer community. In cities and towns all across America big box retailers are expanding, Internet start-ups are launching, hardware stores are adding kitchen departments and even major supermarket chains are launching more comprehensive kitchenware sections.

Is this a cause for concern? You bet.

Any change in the retail world requires investigation and study to determine what a new competitor may be doing right and just as importantly, to uncover what they might be doing wrong. Some believe independent specialty retailers are at an inherent disadvantage when larger competitors come to town.

This is not true. Your store is special and has many important points of differentiation that should allow you not just to survive but to thrive. Here are a few things that should define your store and that define what makes this industry special.

Passion

- You have passion for your business. Passion for the products you sell, the employees who work for you and passion for the high quality of customer service you provide to every customer. This passion simply cannot be equaled by your Big Box competitors. The self-service checkout at the giant home center can be called efficient but it can never be considered an example of passion.

Entertainment

- Your store today has to be all about entertainment. Look at the Apple store. It isn't just a place to buy an iPad, iPhone or computer. It is a place to spend time, to learn, to test, to be en-

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by Frank Brady



Defining Your Store

create a memorable retail shopping experience to not just survive, but to thrive

tertained and even amazed.

Mirroring Apple's merchandising model is a big leap for any retailer but that shouldn't stop you from improving the quality of in-store demonstrations or even adding coffee bars, gelato bars or fresh baked goods counters to keep customers coming back and thinking of your store first.

Memories

- Your store must provide experiences to remember all day every day. My wife recently needed a dress for my son's wedding. She labored over where to shop and was dreading the whole experience. My daughter jumped in, calling the local department store and speaking with an in-store shopper. When my wife visited the store a few days later, there was a wonderful range of beautiful dresses, but her favorite was just one size off a perfect fit. The salesperson found that exact size 400 miles away and arranged

for it to arrive the next day. My wife looked beautiful for the wedding and everyone told her so. And she told all who would listen of her fantastic buying experience, recommending both the store and sales person. People never forget experiences like these.

All In The Family

- Your store should be a family destination for you to attain the full value of sales from each family in your trading area. Cooking programs and products for newlyweds, grandparents, new parents, kids, Moms and Dads can be merchandised and marketed every day. The more inclusive you are in your efforts, the more success you will generate.

Education

- Of all the hats you wear every day, perhaps none is more important than that of educator.

The seriousness and determination with which you approach this responsibility will define your retail store within your community.

You must be able to teach people about the products you sell and explain how those products work to benefit your customers. Big Box retailers expect their customers to read the package. For them, that is considered good service.

Go one step further. Take your educational efforts outside the four walls of your store and seek out opportunities to talk to your community. You are the expert and your knowledge can inspire others and will inspire them to come to your store.

The WOW Factor

- WOW!!! It stops people in their tracks and makes people feel they have to have it. WOW!!! products bring a store to life and boost the morale of salespeople and customers alike.

I realized many years ago that to make perfect froth for a Cappuccino, you really didn't need steam but agitation. I invented a product called Caffe Froth that took nonfat milk and in seconds turned it into the best froth possible. It exceeded consumers' expectations and we sold millions! WOW!!! products take time to find but are well worth the effort.

You are special and so is your store. You have unique talents and that can unlock the opportunities all around you and define who you are to your customer base.

This industry needs your creativity and determination to succeed.

Frank Brady has more than 30 years of experience in the gourmet housewares business as founder and CEO of Brady Marketing, a San Francisco-based sales and marketing company.