

VALUE YOUR ACCESSORIES and boost bottle sales

by Chris McBeath



When retail guru Robert Spector shared the secrets of Nordstrom's success, and made a chunk of change in doing so, the face of retailing was changed forever. Consumers were "in" on the arts of persuasion, and the study of how people shopped became a sophisticated science. Add the Internet, and the contest has evolved to a whole new, fast-moving ball game against which bricks-and-mortar stores must now compete. That includes catering to a customer who is, as various studies reveal, more demanding and increasingly attention deficit. Look no further than the so-called Generation Y whose surfing childhood has taught them to think in bytes, literally and figuratively. They're looking for fast and easy engagement, originality, and value-added ideas. Therein lays the opportunity.

Engaging Customers

"Although accessories are a small part of our overall revenues, they offer an excellent mark-up, often as much as 100%", says Stacey Mueller, Manager of the recently opened Berezan Liquor Store in Langley. "More importantly, they add to the buying experience and engage our customers in a way that results in more sales of our primary merchandise."

Mueller, who has an extensive background in retailing, admits that sometimes the selection process can be bit of a hit and miss affair - "we're not an exclusive wine store with clearly defined clientele" - but since displays can be changed quickly in response to the season, customer



demand, or sheer novelty appeal, offering non-alcoholic wares is a way to keep the store an exciting place to shop. "They can be a point of differentiation and help build customer loyalty."

Murray Rasmusson, a 15-year veteran of distributing various alcohol-related supplies agrees. "Displays of bottle openers, gift bags and inexpensive glassware are geared to the impulse buy and they need to move fast," he suggests. "These are POP staples to any inventory - the nearer the cash register, the better. However, it's important to make sure that value doesn't translate to cheap; a wine opener must have the strength to pull out a cork, and the durability to last beyond one picnic." Clutter around the cash register is the bane of most operations. But it need not be so.

Consider the Trends

Peter Fisk, business innovator, marketer, and best selling author, is an authority on prevailing trends in commerce. When applied to the liquor industry, they pave the way for a fresh look at sundry, non-alcoholic accessories.

Some of the trends, such as Challenger Brands (as in, serious private labels), and Designer Quality, are already familiar commodities whether in limited edition wines and sought-after vintages, or established, high-end spirits. Take a look at the trends, Simplifying Life (anything that makes life better), and Streamlining (everything fast and convenient), and you open the doors to more inspired service that goes beyond nachos and cheese dip beside cases of beer. Today, these concepts talk to pick-up dinner items, such as



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flavourful crackers with hand-crafted cheeses - the more local the better, summer coolers alongside stylish plastic glasses for the beach, and ready-made gift baskets, which are easy to theme and prepare in advance. "Good merchandising is all about helping your customers think," notes Fisk.

Although your average liquor store can't compete with the box-warehouse space of Everything Wine in North Vancouver (the 12,000 square foot shop carries almost 3,000 different wines), you can adapt and adopt some of their savvy when it comes to accessories. Proportionately speaking, the accessory area is small, but it's packed with nick-nacks that invite tactile browsing. There's a good range of Riedel glassware, books, and publications including *Wine Enthusiast*, *Decanter* and *Wine Spectator* (there's even a bin that sells past issues at 50% off); whimsical pieces such as ornamental glass decorations, coasters, and wine-related trivia playing cards as well as well-priced platters and dip dishes to go with jars of gourmet antipasto and spreads. Various bags, already stuffed with colourful tissue, need only a bottle added, and are artfully arranged to inspire a gift-giving mentality. There's also an eco-friendly section featuring those wineries that follow sustainable, organic, or bio-dynamic practices. This is an important consideration when almost half of consumers say environmentally friendly products are the primary factor in their purchase decisions. Regular tasting events are part of the store's modus operandi, which not only attracts new customers, but is creating a local wine community of enthusiastic store ambassadors.

Ideas for Companion Sales

- Accessorize slow movers and place a hot spot in your store (but only for a limited time)
- Work with local producers to establish a "buy local" destination shelf, nook, or alcove
- Set aside an eco-conscious area
- Position books, DVDs and accessories throughout the store
- Show examples of how products can be packaged for gift ideas
- Handmade liqueur chocolates and organic wine chocolates are big impulse sellers
- Host tastings that pair beer and wine with chocolate
- Include one-of-a-kind items in a specialty section, such as hand-painted wine glasses
- Offer specially priced gift sets
- Securely fasten some of your accessory ideas on the wall in your bathroom

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Cultivate the Purchase Experience

Effective retailing is as much about placement and environment as it is the stock, so when Alcool NB Liquor in New Brunswick embraced two key design trends: Concept Space and Engaging Niches, it was banking on success. Responsible for a network of 48 stores and 70 licensed agency partners, the organization is revamping the Alcool NB Liquor purchasing experience. First, it is emphasizing a culture of staff product knowledge and service, and second, remodeled stores now include interior destinations using bottle displays, mood pictures, and themed accessories. Kudos to date include earning top honours last June from the Retail Council of Canada for Retail Innovation Service Excellence (RISE), in a category that included Holt Renfrew, Shoppers Drug Mart, and Home Depot.

For Mueller, retailing is all about crafting a relationship with her customers. "Selling accessory items helps to provide a value experience," she explains. "For example, it costs me cents to throw in a bag of ice with every cooler purchased, yet it brands us with a style of customer service that keeps us in the forefront of purchase decisions."

Retailing Trends into 2011

Concept Spaces – retail beyond selling. Create dynamic environments.

Engaging Niches - don't be average. Encourage shoppers to stay.

Simplifying Life - make life better. Help make customers feel good and the planet healthier.

Challenger Brands - serious private labels. Look for exclusive and out-of-the-ordinary sources.

Digital Hybrids - fusing physical and virtual. Incorporate both online and in-store.

Cool Downtraders - cheaper is better. Glitz is out; ethic/eco-aware is in.

Designer Quality - luxury that lasts. Carry some signature brands.

Streamlining - fast and convenient. Package and place products for easy decisions.

Network Loyalty - loyal to each other. Loyal to websites. Support community causes and carry local product.

Source: Peter Fisk, Genius Works

Catch the Digital Wave

As the fastest growing media segment in North America, point-of-decision digital media is the wave of the future. You just need to look across the border and the results speak for themselves. Already ensconced in large-scale vendors such as Target, Kroger, Costco, and Best Buy, research by Mintel shows consumers will visit stores with in-store digital display networks twice as often, spend 10% more money, and double the number of impulse purchases. Meanwhile, Arbitron, a media-measurement firm, reports that US consumers are more likely to recall in-store video advertising than other media and were subsequently 40% more likely to purchase. And just in case there are any doubts, you need look no further than Walmart. It is constructing a worldwide advertising network to operate in all its stores, which, when fully implemented, will be the fifth biggest TV network in the US, reaching 180 million viewers a month.

Our recommendation is: catch the digital wave, tap into the accessory market in support of your primary focus, and realize that showmanship is part of today's selling success. ☎

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