



Create a consistent brand personality to keep customers coming back for more.

BY KATE PARHAM

**W**e all know how it's done: you decide to open a store. You pick the merchandise, design a logo, choose a location. But, as much as we want it to be that simple, creating a brand requires so much more than simply setting up shop and watching the customers pour in. Every store has a personality, and your brand must convey that personality during every interaction with current and future customers.

With that in mind, Rick Segel, president of the Florida-based training, writing and publishing consortium Rick Segel & Associates, suggests that the first step to establishing your brand's personality is to determine who you are as a store.

Segel recommends that retailers ask themselves the following questions:

- ▶ **WHAT ARE MY VALUES?**
- ▶ **WHAT'S MY VISION FOR MY STORE?**
- ▶ **WHAT KIND OF EXPERIENCE DO I WANT MY CUSTOMER TO HAVE?**

"Once you tie your answers into a common theme, then everything you do becomes very simple because you just follow the theme," says Segel. But it must be logical. "So many times, someone creates this image and it doesn't mean anything to anybody except the person who designed it."

#### **CONSISTENCY IS KEY**

Once you've determined a personality, you'll need to "create material using the company's logo repeatedly and consistently, [from] colors, fonts, style and signage," says Diane Chiasson, president of Chiasson Consultants Inc. "You have to make sure that your brand sends the right message to your customers, and not confuse them by not giving people what they expect."

Mike Gatti, executive director of retail advertising and marketing at the National Retail Foundation, agrees. "The customer has certain expectations when they walk into a store. And whatever that store is, if you're thinking of changing it, you need to consider how that will affect customer base," he says.

For example, “if the customer is used to paying top dollar for the best merchandise and now you’re carrying discount merchandise, you’re confusing the trust you’ve built with customer.”

Building a relationship of trust and authenticity is of utmost importance when it comes to branding. In order to build this kind of relationship, Gatti says stores must always deliver on the same promise to their customer, whatever that promise may be. In fact, says Gatti, “many retailers have lost steps because they try to be somebody different than who they are.”

Gatti likens a store’s personality to a friend who constantly changes her hair color. When it’s continually changing, “people are going to wonder, ‘Are they really different, or are they just trying to be different... And why are they trying so hard?’”

### SIGNAGE SUCCESS

One of the most important components when it comes to branding is a store’s signage, and that should be reflected on everything from your store’s displays and shopping bags to sales receipts and price tags. “Your brand must remain present on everything the customer touches, so that when the customer sees that brand, they know it’s your store,” says

Gatti. He recalls an old Coca-Cola commercial where the bottle is smashed on the sidewalk and pass-byers can still identify the bottle as Coke. To Gatti, that is successful branding. “You want a customer to be able to see just a piece of your brand and still know it’s you.”

So how can you use signage to establish your brand? Segel recommends doing a sign audit of your store. Look around and study what kind of signs you have and how you’re using them. According to Segel, your store’s signage should accomplish at least one, and preferably two or three, of these five things:

► **INFORM:** tells your customer something about your store or product

► **SELL:** persuades your customer to make a purchase

► **EDUCATE:** teaches your customer something about your store or product

► **ENTERTAIN:** provides amusement to your customer

► **EMOTION:** psychologically connects your customer to your store

How many do you have? “You can have too many if you have a lot of these categories, but not enough if you have 20 signs from only one



category,” says Segel.

If you’re still left scratching your head about branding, take a note from Starbucks. “When you walk into one of their stores, they always have lots of posters and signage about the type of beans they sell, their relationship with the bean growers and their eco-friendly products,” says Chiasson, who believes a great way to incorporate branding in your store is to “tell customers a story, philosophy or mission statement.” This can help give customers a bit of insight into the history behind the company, often establishing an emotional connection with the customer.

Chiasson also suggests writing “about what the store is doing to become more energy-efficient, or even funny anecdotes or stories, if the store attracts a younger, more hip clientele. Graphics are always good to add to the relevance of the story and brand positioning.”

The next time you’re in a store, look around for signage inspiration. “If the brand represents serving the customer, then the use of signage reinforces that whole concept,” says Segel. “Signage reinforces what the store values in their brand and their positioning.” **IS**

## Unique Ideas Make for Memorable Branding

MANY RETAILERS STRUGGLE with how to establish their brand in a unique way. Sure, loyalty cards, fun packaging and signature shopping carts are a great way to give your store personality. But what about something totally different to set your store apart? Check out these two ideas from the branding experts:

► **AROMATHERAPY:** “Try pumping a fragrance into the air to establish who you are,” says Mike Gatti, executive director of retail advertising and marketing at the National Retail Foundation. “Like Aveda’s rosemary mint scent. I



one who has a lot of knowledge about products in that store,” Gatti says.

don’t have to look at the sign to know what store I’m in front of. I can even be walking next to somebody and know what brand they use.”

► **UNIFORMS:** Take a page out of Best Buy’s book and establish a meaningful uniform for your employees. Best Buy employees must pass educational courses to wear the signature blue shirt. “So, if you walk up to a blue shirt at Best Buy, you know you’ll find some-

## Use Creativity to Increase Foot Traffic

Just having a great product isn't enough to get new shoppers into your store anymore. Today's customers are shopping for an experience, connection and a brand that engages them, says Melanie McIntosh of Inspire Retail Solutions. Here are five ways to give them exactly that:



**1. "TREAT YOUR CUSTOMERS LIKE GUESTS IN YOUR HOME,"** says McIntosh, who recommends welcoming customers in ways they don't expect: take their coat, offer a glass of sparkling water and show them around.

**2. EMBRACE SOCIAL NETWORKING.** "People are connecting on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and often they want to meet in person as well," says McIntosh. So, bring the Internet-style of networking to your store and host a meetup.

**3. INCORPORATE SEASONAL/HOLIDAY THEMES.** A great example is a local coffee shop that helped singles connect

for Valentine's by giving them red coffee sleeves to signal that they were interested in meeting someone.

**4. OFFER EDUCATIONAL CLASSES.**

"Enhance the value of your product with educational classes and meet customer needs at the same time," says McIntosh, who cites an example of a local fashion

consignment store that hosted workshops with a personal stylist to help customers find the right clothes for their body type.

**5. START A CLUB.** "A sports store could be a meeting place for people to go on hikes," suggests McIntosh. Eco-conscious retailers could do environmental projects. Stores that sell baby products could host parenting meetup groups. "Not only do customers learn and shop, but they connect with other customers who share their interests." – KP

## Give Customers a Voice with Surveys



Ever wondered what your customers are really thinking? Want to make your clients feel like their opinion matters? Try using a survey to connect with customers and gain insight into their thinking. "Surveys

are great because they allow you to open up a conversation that you are leading," says survey enthusiast Dale Traxler, CEO of Beaded Impressions, Inc. Traxler suggests Constant Contact, an inexpensive, easy-to-use tool, to help you get started. Whichever survey tool you use, be sure to keep these simple tips in mind:

**USE VARIOUS TYPES OF QUESTIONS:** Not all questions are created equal. Be sure to include various formats, such as multiple choice, open ended, list ranking and selecting all that

apply. It's also important to cover various topics from customer satisfaction, website feedback and product or service opinions.

**DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT:** Customers want to see the direct result of their feedback, so acting on the comments you receive is important. "We usually blog about the general results so that customers gain some insight into other people's thoughts," says Traxler.

**OFFER AN INCENTIVE:** You can have the best survey there is, but if customers don't have a reason to respond, it won't matter. "We frequently provide an incentive, like a coupon for a discount on their next purchase," says Traxler. "We offered a \$100 gift certificate on our last survey and got almost 300 detailed responses. Not bad for a total investment far less than \$100."

**MAKE EXPECTATIONS CLEAR:** "On your introductory page, let the respondent know the exact purpose of the survey, how long it will take them to complete and what you will do with the results," recommends Traxler. "Also, make sure respondents understand you respect their privacy." – KP