



Take a New Look at Your Store Through Your Customers' Eyes

When was the last time you changed your window? Have potential customers passed that same window display so many times that they don't see it anymore?

Seeing your store through your customers' eyes is difficult. We become so familiar with our surroundings that it is easier to see what we intended rather than what is really there. Here is a simple effective approach. Take pictures of your store. This simple technique can give you an important arms-length perspective.

1. Get a still camera and some color film. It doesn't have to be a fancy camera and they don't have to be great pictures (nobody needs to see them but you). Use a still camera because it allows you to study individual views of your store. If you have a video camera, use it as well (but not instead of) to do a real-time walk-past your storefront and through your store. Video will very effectively demonstrate how quickly you must grab the customer's eye.

2. Take your shots from your customers' viewpoint, sequentially from the storefront through to the bathroom (even if its not public, don't they use it?) and back again. Follow the route your customer most often takes.

Storefront: Photograph the approach from all directions, from across the street, and from any angle, or spot nearby where the customer might see and look at you're storefront. Also include views from a car, and from down the street. Make sure you include your neighbors' windows in some of the shots so you can see who, if anyone, might be stealing your thunder.

Inside: Start at the first display (most customers will bypass this one and stop at the second) and take shots in the same order that shoppers typically move through your store. Shoot all your walls by overlapping the shots so you can build a panoramic view with the prints. Take shots of your feature areas, the back wall, the Point of Purchase (POP) area or cash desk and, finally, what the customers sees behind the cash desk.

3. Mount the prints on a board (or boards if you got carried away) to build a picture of your store as your customer sees it. Believe what you see. This is where the brutal reality comes in—the camera isn't lying.



Here are some hints on interpretation: your eyes will naturally be drawn to the brightest or whitest areas of the picture. If these areas are blank white walls or light bulbs, that's what will be attracting your customer's eye. If your lights seem to be shining into the camera, they're probably shining in your customer's eyes. Very dark areas may not be well enough lighted.

4. Here's a list of the things to look for when doing this exercise:

Storefront:

Are the windows clean?
Is store name visible as you approach? Standing under the canopy? From across street or mall?
Does store sign look permanent or temporary?
Is the illuminated sign turned on? Is it working?
Who looks better—you or your neighbors?

Window Presentation:

What caught your eye? Reflections? Signs? Merchandise? Empty Space?
Lights?
At a glance, have you managed to tell the story of what's being sold? Selection?
Style? Assortment? Price?
Are your displays at eye level—or too low?
Are display lights working and properly aimed?

First impression:

Has an experience been created at the entrance?
Is there a dump table? (This is not an experience.)
Is it great new merchandise and creative presentations?
Are there poorly executed hand written signs?
Is there a visual description of the product offering?
At a glance, what is your product offering as defined by first impressions?

Planning the trip through store:

Are you drawn to move through the store or does it just look confusing? Or boring?
Do you have seasonal displays and impulse merchandise at the front of the store?
Do you have important or expensive merchandise below eye level? (The lower down it is, the less value it is perceived to have.)
Do your walls support the majority of your merchandise? (It's your most valuable space.)
Is the product on wall displayed using cross- merchandising ideas to encourage add-on purchases? Or is it merely warehoused?
Is the back wall interesting enough to encourage your customer to go, look, and see?



Graphics Program:

- Are the signs poorly executed hand-written or professional looking?
- Are the signs old, dog-eared, full of corrections?
- Is there a consistent theme, color, or graphic?
- Is your customer informed about the store, the services, the promotion, why you're different?
- Have you done the math? (Most customers cannot easily convert percentages to savings. Tell them that 30% off = \$X.00.)
- Are you delivering information with impact?

Point of Purchase/Cash Desk:

- Is your back often to customer?
- Does it function well to cash, wrap, and sell?
- Is it so full of stuff that you can't focus on anything?
- Is there an opportunity to sell your customer additional merchandise, services, and create a client list?

Send Them Packing:

- Is your packaging innovative but not wasteful?
- Is it environmentally friendly?
- Is it reusable packaging that creates advertising?
- Is there a return address, business card, a logo/graphic, a contact name?