



# Art of Shopping

If everything around  
Shopper Marketing is evolving,  
then so, too, must our approach to its **creative.**

In late September, *Advertising Age* and *The Wall Street Journal* reported on a groundbreaking pilot study—led by the In-Store Marketing Institute and a consortium of blue chip companies including Procter & Gamble—that is finally making headway on “in-store GRP” or a standardized, reach-and-frequency type of measurement for in-store communication.

The initiative helps make “in-store” a deliberate and purposeful choice in the integrated media mix. It also helps place Shopper Marketing earlier in the strategic planning cycle and allows for the early allocation of budget for innovative, new communication technologies in the retail space.

There are other signs of momentum, too. At a recent summit of retailers, brands, and suppliers, much of the chatter surrounded some of the organizational changes happening within companies to acknowledge the importance of Shopper Marketing as a discipline: in-store media planners and buyers at agencies;

directors of shopper insights at retailers; and all manner of channel-marketing specialties within brand organizations.

Perhaps the most encouraging indicator is the agreement, academically at least, that the store is a place both to build brands *and* to sell brands. It is a recognition that the store may be where your consumer sees your brand for the first time. More important, it is an acknowledgement that the store-branded environment, in and of itself, can come to bear significantly on how a product brand is perceived.

According to a *Reveries.com* survey, 94% of respondents are reportedly seeking alternatives to TV and 72% name in-store marketing as their main “alternative media approach” being explored.

#### SOMETHING IS MISSING

Despite this momentum, the one element of Shopper Marketing underrepresented in the larger conversation is *creative* and its evolutionary progress.

As every surface in the store is being monetized, from on-shelf flat screens to the diaper-changing table in the ladies' restroom, and as the store becomes its own media universe, not enough attention is being paid to asking questions about the softer side of the opportunity.

How do you approach these new creative units? What is the cultural relevance of the store context? How do you account for engagement when doing in-store media planning?

As Evan Anthony, corporate vp of marketing and advertising at Kroger, so candidly asked the audience at the In-Store Summit last April (paraphrased): "What goes on all of these flat screens in my store? It's not edited TV spots and it's not digital POS. It's something different. But what is it?"

Indeed, what is the immediate cultural or contextual relevance that these new pixels and surfaces can creatively convey in a meaningful way to the shopper?

Much useful research has been conducted around trip management and the correlating cultural occasions for purchases. While these efforts have yielded helpful needs-state segmentations, they are often limited in their application to only specific retailers or specific categories.

The fear is that we might be missing a higher-order, more essential understanding of the relationship Americans have to shopping and the role shopping plays in our lives.

Progressively for shoppers, *how* products are organized, merchandised, and cross-promoted is as important as *what* products are offered. Shoppers are responding to inspired and solution-driven assortments and displays. One need look no further than Target and its Warhol-esque celebration of commodity brands using color and an iconic packaging aesthetic as a seductive art object juxtaposed with fashion.

As Pam Danziger writes in her new book, *Shopping: Why We Love It and How Retailers Can Create the Ultimate Experience*: "Increasingly success at retail is less about what the retailer has to sell and more

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about how they sell it. This is the new experiential paradigm shift in shopping."

She continues: "This shift toward the shopping experience marks the biggest change to occur in the retailing landscape over the past century. A shift away from retailing as a business of selling more merchandise (a product-based business) into a business that creates shopping experiences (a people-based business) with

the objective of selling stuff purely as a consequence or result of that experience."

Three conventions seem to be holding us back:

▶ **Dogma of consumer product research.** Most exploratory, qualitative research dollars are spent at a micro category or brand level and thus inform only a particular marketing episode. Additionally, we seem to be caught in the trap of asking questions that offer only answers within the accepted set of norms or possibilities.

Malcolm Gladwell takes the matter of focus groups to task somewhat in his book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. It's not that we in research are not sincerely seeking truths, but we have allowed a certain *ennui* to set in relative to exploratory research versus testing. This is especially true when it comes to shopper research.

▶ **Science of shopping.** To date, the most fervor around the idea of the store as media has centered on gathering institutional knowledge to establish measurement tools, rate cards, and payout models. Shopper learning has understandably and logically focused on store navigation and aisle behavior. The point is not that this is flawed, but that an overemphasis on the *science* of shopping, without equal emphasis on the *art* of shopping, would repeat the mistakes of previous new-media introductions.

▶ **Shopping as chore.** For decades, we've talked about time compression and the multitasking consumer. And yes, of course, shoppers demand convenience as a part of value. But if shopping for replenishable items is such a fundamental part of our cultural fabric



## We may not have the answers, but let's ask the questions that might inspire the conversation around the creative future of in-store communication.

and retail-store brands are such a fundamental part of the landscape (figuratively and literally), why do we as marketers still assume shopping is, by and large, dreadful?

Today's consumers spend time very differently; the lines of recreation, entertainment, work, and task are completely blurred. It stands to reason, then, that a weekly stock-up trip to the grocery store is a completely untapped opportunity to connect *emotionally*.

Retailers seem to be leading this exploration; the suggestion is that we as marketers may still be stuck in an old "below the line" mindset about in-store communication and messaging.

Just what is the new creative frontier of in-store? The risk is to underestimate the power of Shopper Marketing. We—brands, retailers, media companies, agencies—need to allow ourselves to ask bolder questions about the possibilities of the landscape. As with any pursuit of understanding what the future might look like, discomfort and dissent will come with the territory.

As Peter Drucker mused, "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

### FINDING THE BALANCE

As a starting point for tackling the brave new creative frontier of in-store media, we are assisted by a handful of guiding principles for communication strategy in retail marketing. These are not new; rather, they are simple concepts that tend to get buried under the weight of so much hard-data collection.

► **Value.** If you were to pay a visit to Texas A&M's Retail Studies program, you would hear the value equation:  $V = Q/P + T + E$ . Value is not a simple function of quality and price and time anymore. It is inclusive of the intangible "E": Emotion. Education. Entertainment. Engagement. It's so simple that it's easy for us to forget sometimes when we sit down to develop communication ideas.

### ► Store Communication

**Zones.** The basic premise is that the store is broken into certain "zones" (e.g., perimeter, checkout, etc.) and that each possesses its own unique behavioral dynamics and communication opportunities. Each zone has its own communication viability and its own relevance

in terms of reach-and-frequency considerations.

► **Observation.** Shopper qualitative research is different than the more typical upstream consumer research. This is for the simple reason that it seeks to understand behavior more than attitudes. Clearly the two are not mutually exclusive, but the mistake is to apply the blunt instrument of the focus group to capture observational cues like touching, smelling, or reading. The exploration of shopping is highly observational and interpretive. It requires natural settings and questioning in proximity to the actual behaviors.

Said another way, people just can't honestly sit in a blank room and talk about why they bought something two weeks ago. Shopper research needs to include the chasm between what people *say* and what they actually *do*. As humans, we like to see ourselves as rational, logical beings. But in 21st century abundance, shopping is way beyond a rational exercise.

► **Cultural Trends.** As Pam Danziger also says in her book, the future of retail is a "convergence of atmosphere, design, and merchandise." This is the backdrop against which brands must create meaningful and differentiated in-store communications.

Consumers have developed highly sophisticated filters to cope with marketing saturation. So, what gets through the gates? How does a brand find expanded, deeper relevance to engage at retail? To overlook the influence of macro cultural trends is to limit your ability to connect your brand to a shopper. Cultural trends are reflections of what people find relevant.

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strive to be seen as “a store of the community,” the reflection of culture is even more imperative.

### WHO SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD?

The job of helping brands, retailers, and media outlets understand just how to optimize the potential of all the existing and emerging technologies applied tactically in-store is largely the responsibility of the agency partner.

Agencies are best positioned, and most obligated, to advance the conceptual and creative dialogue around in-store marketing. Not only are agencies implicitly charged with the responsibility of shopper intimacy and behavioral insight, but creative ideas are also the true lifeblood and the only demonstrable competitive advantage an agency has.

To date, agencies have yet to collectively address the creative potential of in-store marketing to capture shopper hearts and minds and dollars. The conversations do exist, but the suggestion here is that these conversations need to go public and get elevated beyond the episodic research debrief.

If we are truly capable of shaping cultural history through marketing (which TV ads and the internet have blatantly proven), then it's time to start openly asking and debating the bigger questions that challenge the conventional thinking around in-store marketing creative and its aesthetic.

To get the ball rolling, here are a few topics and questions to chew on:

▶ **Contemporary shopping.** Leisure/recreation vs. bore/chore: In what ways does/can shopping actually fulfill a leisure role with emotional benefits? It's a multitasking world, where all the lines of work and play are blurred. Does shopping connect us to our community? Does shopping provide any kind of relaxation for us? What is the emotional arc of a typical shopping trip for everyday items?

▶ **Shopping as activism.** Free trade, no animal testing, organics, green stores, and fair treatment of

workers—products and shopping are exceptionally politicized now. But do we really exercise our politics or reinforce our political persona through our everyday trips and purchases?

▶ **Temptation.** How and why do certain items that are not on the list end up in the cart? What is the rationalization that takes

place? Are these unplanned purchases really about needs states or are they more about the influence of culture and context that create a sense of desire and relevance for us to justify the purchase?

▶ **Origins of our shopper DNA.** What is the role of family background and culture on our shopping persona? Are we simply shopping around a set of financial parameters and lifestyle occasions or is there a deeper imprint that influences an innate shopping sensibility for us? What role do generational traits play in forming our shopping persona?

Ultimately, these are exciting and complicated times for marketers and consumers. As the quantitative side of the in-store marketing equation succeeds in delivering more precise, granular understanding of the store as media, the *qualitative* side of the equation is best served by a more contemporary lens for understanding shopping at a macro cultural level.

This is necessary for the advancement of creative ideas that productively connect consumers to brands through in-store marketing. With both sides of the equation in balance, we, as marketers, can shape new economic futures for businesses and new experiential futures for shoppers. ■



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