



The Raphael Report

Observations on marketing, advertising, sales and promotions
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July 2003

Number 50

How People Shop

Which direction do customers take when they walk into your business?

What themes are best for rooms with no windows?

Is it a good or bad idea to see directly from the front door straight through to your back room?

And who cares anyhow?

The customer cares, at least subconsciously, according to many studies on how customers shop.

What NOT To Do

It begins with the path the customer takes after they come in your front door.

They are more comfortable walking counter-clockwise and will automatically go in this direction.

Here's one result of a study on "How People Shop" by Sorensen Associates, based in Minneapolis and pioneers of in-store research. Their conclusion, "Don't build your entrance on the left side of your building if you want to encourage longer shopping trips."

They said this is even a common occurrence in the animal kingdom where elephant herds move counter-clockwise when migrating for water.

(Unless they're from the UK or Australia where they walk on the left.)

What To Do

Conclusion: If your store's entrance is on the left side of your building, shoppers are forced to move clockwise – to their left - opposite to their natural inclination. Result: they leave more quickly, contradicting Robert Frost's idea to "choose the road less traveled."

This fact was emphasized in the book, "Why We Buy," by Paco Underhill, a consultant to major corporations. His research says, "American shoppers automatically move to the right which means the front right side of any store is its prime real estate where the most important goods should go."

We always had a rack with deeply discounted merchandise the customer saw as soon as they walked in our clothing store. Yes, on the right hand side a few feet from the entrance. The sign on the rack had a dramatic price reduction that stopped them. Example: "Buy one for \$10.00 and your second one is free." Why this is important: Once the customer starts buying something . . . anything . . . she is ready to buy something else.

Paco Underhill says, "The amount of time a shopper spends in a store is perhaps the single most important factor determining how much she or he will buy."

Another Piece Of The Shopping Puzzle

Shoppers do NOT shop your entire store. Most studies say the average person walks through

only 25% of your shop.

Example: A supermarket owner in Wisconsin asked his customers to fill out surveys on what departments they liked and didn't like in his store. One of the categories listed was their photo department. The retailer were amazed when he received many comments asking, "What photo department?" The customer didn't know it existed because they never wandered over to that part of the store.

They quickly repositioned that department near the normal walking pattern and sales increased dramatically.

And Then There Is Feng Shui

Another way physical elements affect consumer's buying pattern is best explained with the Chinese philosophy "Feng Shui" - living in harmony with your surroundings. This is a thousand-year-old "art of placement" method to find the right direction to physically position your inventory. Having appropriate Feng Shui in the design of your store and your merchandise allows you to work "in an environment of health, love, happiness and wealth."

Since "wealth" ties in with "doing more business" which means customers buy more, let's examine what Feng Shui experts say you should do in placement of your products.

- Make sure the customer can easily see your front entrance. It should follow the street flow with your front door clearly marked. Your exterior signage should have strong colors.

- Having a straight-through view from the front to the back of your store means the "incoming energy" (when the customer first arrives) quickly dissipates and the customer heads for the back of your store and leaves a few minutes after they arrive. Your store has lost its positive energy. Think of nature and the winding paths through gardens.

- Having dramatic angles or odd shapes may make your building look attractive from a distance but it will not be a comfortable place to work. Here's why: the "chi" (energy) boomerangs around the room, causing lack of focus.

Said one Feng Shui expert, "I once saw the design of a new building by a famous architect and it looked like crumpled piece of paper! This can't possibly be good Feng Shui" (well, so much for Frank Gehry).

Does this really work?

"Absolutely" says June Tranner who has a healing clinic in York, England.

She started in business doing about \$15,000 a year. She went to Carole Chu, a Feng Shui expert who redesigned her store creating a more harmonious flow of "chi". Her business jumped to nearly \$150,000!

Owners Esme Hecht and Alex Watts of Ritz Earwear and custom jewelry in Lake Katrine, New York saw a dramatic decrease in sales and employees quitting for no reason. They called in a Feng Shui consultant. She placed boulders outside the front door of the company plant to "protect" the business and installed a water cooler to attract positive energy.

The company's business dramatically increased overnight. Said owner Hecht, "Sales picked up. I thought it was a fluke. But business continues to improve and we have a happier group of employees."

Do all these ideas really work?

Who knows? Why don't you walk under a ladder leaning against a building? Or never let a black cat cross your path? Or hold your breath when driving through a cemetery?

Not sure. But the next time you visit us, you'll recognize our office. It's the one with the big boulders outside and, as you approach my entrance there's a big sign with our name and you'll hear the sound of falling water as you come in.