



Photo: Laszlo Regos Photography

## The 3Rs

# R einvent R eshape R ethink

MAKING SMALL CHANGES TO CREATE BIG  
IMPACT TO YOUR RETAIL EXPERIENCE.

**T**he world, in reality, is not a mass market. In the U.S., for example, the most successful retailers have not been necessarily the biggest. Companies such as Walmart have had multiple successive quarters of declining store sales and reduced traffic. Many believe this is relative to the continuing “simplification” that companies have undergone in terms of removing localised product, consolidating SKUs and trying to become one-size-fits-all. Conversely, Bed Bath & Beyond, the leading home furnishings retailer in the U.S., has had increasing profitability and has moved more and more to localised decision making and buying, product placement, and promotions. They have also been hiring smart store managers who know their customers, understand the local needs, and while leveraging the buying power and logistics muscle of the company, do so in ways that are highly reflective of their individual customer’s needs.

Touchpoints such as scent, sound and the thousand details that make for a successful retail store can be executed in elements such as finishes, fixtures, propping, lighting, and shop-keeping standards.

Likewise, most retail experts who enter the Indian market make a similar mistake in seeing the country as a monolithic market. They talk about the emerging middle class as if it represents a uniformed market, stereotyping it as a monolithic march towards Western values and consumption. Yet they fail to recognise the diversity - be it geographic, cultural, historic and even across demographic lines such as professional choices, religious values and politics - all which are major influencers in shaping consumer choice and preferences.

### Understanding the Indian footprint

Further complicating this understanding and analysis is the enormous information gathering power of the Indian consumer. Of course in some ways, this power is influenced by traditional media and advertising, whether it is above the line or below the line through television, online and via the powerful role that the entertainment industry plays in shaping the Indian consumer's perceptions.

More typically, retailers have been able to manage the pace of change and growing consumer expectations within their own home market. Admittedly, at the very high end of retail, i.e. the luxury segment, the customer has always seen themselves as an international consumer. They have lived in one place, but very often shopped, consumed on the world stage, not just at home. In thinking about the details and touchpoints that this customer is looking for and ways to increase their shopping and consumption within the Indian market is clearly a challenge, given their flexibility, choices, and ability to opt-in or opt-out as their perception of the world is more likely seen in terms of Paris, London and New York, than it is Mumbai, Delhi, et cetera.

Therefore, the major opportunity exists with the customer whose aspirations, along with their social family connections, to be more aspirationally international, rather than international in reality. While looking for discovery, this consumer, with his or her world-class perspective, is more likely to consume closer to home for reasons both practical and emotional. This consumer is looking for the best of both worlds, not the abdication of one and the creation of the other. Here is where the challenge becomes most interesting, most strategic and ultimately, the most challenging in bringing the best of both worlds together.

### Creating the 4D Experience

There are no shortcuts. Every detail is critical. Everything must be scripted and every player has a role - from the visual merchandising, sales training, marketing (be it in store or through outbound media), the product and all the touchpoints that can activate and create a 4D experience. Touchpoints such as scent, sound and the thousand details that make for a successful retail store can be executed in elements such as finishes, fixtures, propping, lighting, and shop-keeping standards.

### Re-inventing your world

So, find here a few practical thoughts on how to jump on this moving train without getting hurt. Pick the right journey and you too may hopefully live happily ever after.

Begin with a clean slate. Agree, at least for a moment in time, to take off



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your blinders, look at the world through a new set of lenses, a fresh eye and set aside biases and prejudices, be it towards your own customer or your international perspective to see, hear and feel. Yes, you'll need to put your experience hat back on at some point on the journey, but take a moment to do a bit of intellectual spring cleaning. I advise people to literally drag everything out to the curbside and parking lot. Look at your business as a series of empty rooms; a new beginning, a new home. You're entitled to drag a favourite idea or a sentimental attachment back into your new home, but start fresh.

Create a fundamental plan and set the plan out far enough so that you have a creative runway to build the plan. Know that not everything will be finished on the first day of the new concept opening, but this degree of white space will help with a platform of change and reinvention for your customer as well.

Build a discovery trail through the creation of a series of events, moments, pacing that rhythm to assure the right

level of interest and equally the right level of white space between your points of contact. This may literally not be a physical trail, but more a trail of inspiration, new ideas, humour, provocation and emotional connection with your customer to keep them engaged and primed as they continue to move through the environment.

Think about amplification. In some cases, maybe amplify the unexpected and the frivolous (think of Lady Gaga's hairstyles). Build stories. It might be about putting everything that is red in the store in one place regardless of classification, use, or purpose. Consider having an empty table in the store, with one item sitting on it and a tiny print sign to draw the curious. You can create amplification by visually merchandising parts of the space that are highly dense, and others that are quite open, but this sense of contrast can be quite effective in making the customer take a second look.

Create interrupters and focus. This may be by bringing in a collection of product that is totally unexpected. It

might be the use of fitting rooms as a social gathering point. It may be a service or amenity that you provide to your customers, that is, a place to take a respite from shopping, or another moment of hospitality that takes them out of their go-mode.

Look at your store as a series of neighbourhoods. The most interesting neighbourhoods that we go to are unique and varied. Some are kinetic and exotic while others are peaceful and relaxing. Within your space the creation of similar neighbourhoods provide opportunities for people to gather, engage in conversation and to create moments that persuade the customer to linger longer, look with more intention and to be either revved up or calmed down in such a way that it extends their stay and interest level throughout their shopping trip.

Much to think about! How can you, through ideas big and small rethink, reshape and reinvent your brand, your retail experience and your customer relationship on this global, yet local retail canvas?

How can you create the perfect marriage? (Yes, there is some truth to the adage that opposites attract). What are your opposites that create a paradox and a positive emotional tension to engage and intrigue the customer?

How can you bring the best resources, both local and global, to craft and set the destination for your company's journey to retail success? **BoF**

*Next month: Display Basics by Swati Bhalla.*

### About the author

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