



DESIGNING STRATEGIES

Business Strategies for the Design Industry

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Is everyone ready for a new 'normal'? According to a recent article by Marla Matzer Rose in *The Columbus Dispatch*, that is exactly what we can expect from this economy. And, it is likely to stick around quite a while even after recovery begins. Rose cited a study by Retail Forward, Inc. that showed how retail consumers' purchasing habits had started to change even before the Wall Street crisis hit last August.

Customers are shopping less often, shopping around more for price, settling for less expensive models, and buying more store brands. They are only buying what they really need. Even coupon clipping is on the rise. Stores like Walmart and the various versions of Dollar stores are seeing an influx of new customers as a result of these recessionary times and are changing their product mix to accommodate this higher level customer. Their big challenge will be how to keep these new customers once the economy makes its upswing in 2010.



Visualize

Consumer spending habits are certainly changing. Starbucks, who changed millions of people's behavior from making morning coffee at home to standing in line to pay \$3.00-4.00 for a cup of 'customized' coffee, has felt the hit in a significant way. They have closed down a significant number of their stores, begun bundling their beverages with pastries, and even added less expensive 'basic' coffee to their menus. Faced with new competition from local coffee houses and even McDonald's, Starbucks is no longer the only game in town. Even with their purported 14,000 versions of gourmet, made-just-for-you coffees, giants like Starbucks are forced to react to the economy, new competitors, and changes in consumer behaviors.



How will this affect you and your organization? Are your regular customers leaving for less expensive alternatives? Are your more loyal customers ordering more from your budget lines? Do you even have any products or services customers can consider as a less expensive alternative? Are long time customers completely MIA? More importantly, what are you doing to address these challenges?

Analyze

Now is the time to focus on strategies to address these issues, as well as your marketing efforts. It is imperative to keep your name and brand in the market place where new customers can find you, and old customers can see that you are still alive and kicking. Take a long look at your product mix. Does it have sufficient choices for the consumer looking for quality at a reasonable cost? Talk to your customers about their needs in this time of tight budgets. What service or products can you provide to meet those reduced budgets? Is there something you can add to your line to meet those needs and yet maintain your company's level of quality and service?



Protecting your brand may never be as important as it will be as we make our way through this recession. Don't fall prey to trying to put just anything on the market under your company brand. Explore your options. Establish a level of quality below which you will not go just to create a budget line. Talk with your supply chain to see how you can collaborate to help both sides stay solvent. Find the best solutions that will maintain your company's integrity and standards while keeping your customer base and attracting new customers who you can develop into long term relationships.

**Visualize - Analyze - Strategize
Plan for success!**

Strategize

*I want to be sure
that my customers tell me what
they need instead
of telling my competitor.*

Adrienne Lumplin
Alternative Access

Maurer On The Move

June 15th
NeoCon Chicago
Terri Maurer Presentation
"Move Your Firm's Customer Experience to WOW!"

June 16th
NeoCon Chicago
"Develop Your On-line Presence"



Terri L. Maurer, FASID

Designing Ways To Survive These Turbulent Times

Looking for ways to survive these turbulent times? Trying to get designers into your showroom, or help a distributor attract new customers? We have a number of continuing education programs on a variety of business topics specifically suited for the issues we're all facing. New topics now being presented include "Business Survival in Turbulent Times" and "Move Your Firm's Customer Experience to WOW!" Presentations on industry trends and topics like *generational diversity – designing for the generations, marketing and selling to the generationism or recruiting and retaining an age-diverse workforce* are also available. For a complete list of programs or for more information, please feel free to contact me directly at 330.666.0802 or tmaurer@maurerconsultinggroup.com. Please remember to email me your questions. If space permits, they will be answered in future issues of **Designing Strategies**.