

Market Research Can Help Us Sell

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Is there a disconnect between how we sell and merchandise and how people buy?

There has been an extensive amount of market research conducted on how people shop and why people buy. Some of that research can be applied to people shopping for flooring, and thus could also be applied to how we lay out our store and display our products.

Here are some interesting insights into the findings of the research: First, when they enter a store shoppers almost always drift to the right; they walk to the right and look toward the right, which is why savvy chain store merchandisers position new products just to the right of known top sellers. Second, people don't read more than three or four words of a sign in a store window. Third, mirrors remind shoppers that they are being watched. And fourth, if you put chairs in a women's clothing store, men will sit and women will shop longer. Same probably holds true for a flooring store.

How do we put these facts to use? First of all, knowing that people tend to turn to the right, you will want to put new, fashionable, and higher end products in a position where people will see them first. Second, you should remember to keep all signage brief and to the point. If details are necessary they should be in fine print. Third, the use of mirrors should be limited to areas where they are non-threatening to the customer, such as on a post as opposed to a back wall where it might be incorrectly interpreted as being a one-way mirror. Fourth, if men often accompany a woman in your store, strategically placed chairs, with appropriate reading material for men will tend to make the men less impatient and the women shop longer and more relaxed.

These are not opinions; they are facts that have been supported by multiple research studies. If you are a flooring retailer the few facts cited above can be put to good use in your store. These are incredibly valuable facts and they are also significant observations about shoppers and the process of selling and buying. More facts and findings follow.

Research has shown that for most retail stores on weekdays there's an absolute predictability about who is in the store and when they will be there. You can tell who's coming in and what opportunities they present. Generally senior citizens shop early in the day; stay-at-home moms shop during the day; and professionals shop after work. That information could make it a lot easier to help the salesperson alter their questioning to better appeal to each group at each time. In larger stores it might determine which salespersons should be on the floor at each part of the day. Since trust is a major factor in selling, which of your salespeople would a senior most likely be able to relate to? Which person for the stay-at-home mom? Likewise what about professionals and two income families?

The amount of time shoppers spend in a store is perhaps the single-most-important factor in determining if they will buy, and how much they will spend. This means that your store must be inviting and comfortable for the shopper. Make sure you have available and offer refreshments to shoppers after they have been in the store for a while. Make sure that restrooms are easily located as well as clean and attractive. And, make sure that you have places where the shopper can sit down and view product samples.

Honoring the transition zone. The study commissioned by the WFCB found that most people don't like to be addressed by a salesperson as soon as they walk into the store. However, they don't want to be ignored either. Generally one-half to one minute after they come in is a "safe time" for a salesperson to approach the shopper.

On entering a store, people need to slow down and sort out what they see. That means that whatever is in the area (zone) they cross before making that transition is pretty much lost on them. If there's a display of merchandise, they're not going to take it in. If there's a sign, they'll probably be moving too fast to absorb its message. If the sales staff immediately hits them with a hearty "Can I help you?" the answer is most likely going to be, "No, I'm just looking."

Since most of the flooring decisions and purchases are made by women, the following facts are probably not as important but may be of some significance when men are doing the shopping. Men always move faster than women do through a store's aisles and displays. Men spend much less time looking, too. In many settings, it's hard to get them to look at anything they hadn't intended on buying. Men also don't like asking where things are -- or any questions at all, for that matter. If a man can't find the product he's looking for, he'll wheel about once or twice, then leave the store without ever asking for help.

For more information I suggest you consider reading Paco Underhill's *"Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping"*.

Questions, comments, and feedback are always welcome.

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