

GROCERY HEADQUARTERS

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CENTER STORE

The sweet secrets of selling candy

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Branding presents a puzzle for produce

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Bottom-line benefits of emphasizing stress

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Grocers don't rate with HBC shoppers

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RFID, new watchdog of the supply chain

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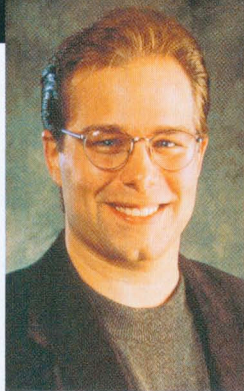
Small steps toward big energy savings

IN WELLNESS RETAILING, IT'S THE CULTURE THAT COUNTS.

Healthy attitude



By Jon Dommissie



Facilities management

The condition of its restrooms can have a major effect on how women—the vast majority of shoppers—view a supermarket.

S YOUR STORE OFFERING EVERYTHING IT CAN TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN YOUR PRIMARY CUSTOMERS? The ones we're talking about, of course, are women, who influence 95% of all purchase decisions and actually make 85% of them.

Many grocers are aware that women—even those who juggle full-time jobs and assume most of the housekeeping and child-rearing duties—take more time to compare quality, selection and pricing than men.

To cater to women—and to compete with boutique and high-end grocers—a growing number of supermarkets are providing more dazzling displays and food-preparation demonstrations than ever before. In addition, grocers are offering more upscale products and services. Many are striving to be one-stop destinations, with banks, pharmacies and other non-grocery businesses housed within.

The goal is to encourage women to enjoy their shopping experience, return frequently and recommend the store to friends. A critical accommodation that can significantly affect the overall impression women shoppers form about the store is the restroom.

Women shoppers, frankly, use the facilities more than men, and often they have children in tow. If they have to ask for a key or be directed through the back storage area or through shipping and receiving, they may feel conspicuous and embarrassed. And if they find the restroom unattractive or unsanitary—toilet paper missing, water on the floor or counters, no place to hang coats or handbags—their impression of the store will sag.

“Too often, grocers don't think of restrooms as part of the retail space,” says designer Kevin O'Donnell, a creative director for Schorleaf in Phoenix. “It's unfortunate because in study after study we learn that women view clean, accommodating restrooms as an important issue. For women, there is a direct connection between the condition of the restroom and their perception of the retailer.”

The reality is that making the shopping experience more enjoyable will directly impact how much consumers spend. The more enjoyable, and according to O'Donnell, the more it's tailored to a woman's needs, the more she will likely spend during each visit. That means making it easy for her to continue shopping, even when she, or someone with her, needs to use a restroom.

If a store has clean, inviting, easily accessible restrooms, women may choose it over a competitor and—because women are loyal shoppers—they will tell their friends about it.

Because women shoppers are often accompanied by children, as well as aging or disabled family members, it's important to make the hand-washing area universally accessible. When women have to lift children to sink height, restroom stops become a burden.

Those who specify fixtures for restrooms might consider multi-height, solid-surface lavatories that incorporate both a standard-height sink and a lower one that is easier for children and wheelchair-bound customers to use. Some models are designed with wave patterns that make the room not only accessible but also attractive.

For women with children, provide enough space in the toilet stall to help junior navigate the potty. Coat hooks on the inside of toilet partition doors are helpful for hanging coats and purses; the alternative is putting them on the floor to collect germs or become damp.

To keep restrooms from feeling institutional and cold, select warm-colored natural stone or ceramic tile. Opt for durable solid-surface lavatory systems in earth shades that coordinate with other accessories in the restroom. Lighting plays an important role in creating a welcoming space. Keep lighting in the warm temperature range and stay on the softer side.

When wives who shop with their husbands need to visit the restroom, they often entrust their coats or handbags to their spouses. Don't forget to accommodate the men, too. It's as simple as placing chairs or a padded bench outside the restroom so husbands have a comfortable place to wait. In the men's room, make space for a diaper-changing station for fathers who shop with kids.

Treat restrooms as an extension of your shopping space. Use them to reach a captive audience and reinforce your brand message by providing sample products such as hand soap, air freshener or shaving products. Allow space for a fresh flower display, too. It not only brightens the restroom, it reminds customers of your floral department.

To save utility costs specify fixtures such as waterless urinals and low-flow faucets. New touchless technologies ensure faucets are only running while in use. Fixtures with capacitive sensing automatically detect a user approaching from any angle, which reduces the user frustration and maintenance headaches formerly associated with electronic sensors. An added benefit is that people don't really want to touch fixtures in public restrooms, so hands-free types are a simple way to reduce germs and increase user confidence.

Among the major complaints of public restroom users are empty soap and tissue dispensers. Specifying electric hand dryers rather than towel dispensers eliminates the need for frequent restocking.

Sure, restrooms are utilitarian and required by code. But well-designed, spacious ones can further attract your key customers—women—and invite them back to your store. □

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