

Retail FOOD for Thought!

By Anne M. Obarski

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I have told my friends over the years that if it looked good enough, I probably would eat dirt. I think that comes from growing up in a home where you always cleaned your plate because, you guessed it, you were reminded daily that there were starving kids in China that would love to have that food. I always wondered what my brussel sprouts would look like once they reached China!

Food can motivate! Let me share a couple of examples I have recently observed. I have an 11-month-old puppy that loves to go in the car. He especially likes to go through the drive-thru at McDonalds. Now I am sure that the reason is that it smells so good and if he is a "good boy" he may get something too. The first time we went through the drive-thru, the young lady at the first window said, "here's some "cookies" for your puppy!" Wow! Zeke was thrilled and I was so impressed that she noticed him and recognized he was a puppy AND that she gave him a treat so that I wasn't giving him "people" food. What customer service! I really think there was a smile on his face and I certainly had a better feeling about McDonalds!

My second example comes from, of all things, a department store! I love department stores. I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio and as far back as I can remember, my favorite thing to do was to go downtown and walk into the big department stores with my mom. You always got dressed up and if you were lucky, you got to eat like a "lady" in the restaurant in the store which was usually on one of the top floors of the building. My fondest memory, which sticks with me today, was the smell of the main floor of the department store. The sweet smell of perfume and make-up was heavenly. There were large crystal chandeliers hanging like clusters of diamonds and the marble floors were buffed to perfection. I think that was when I learned that buying make-up was a shopping experience. To this day, I feel slightly intimidated by the ladies at the cosmetic counter. They always look perfect with their crisp uniforms and flawless make-up. I usually catch a glimpse of myself in one of those large mirrors on the counter and notice lines, and bags, and eyebrows that need plucked, and then they say, "May I help you?" Help? I think I need more than help! Usually when I calm down, I somehow realize that what is in those shiny black compacts and perfectly bottled "potions" will tighten, erase, and beautify even me! Now having said that, why would any cosmetic line choose to offer me FRENCH BREAD as a promotional item and why would food motivate me to come to a department store to buy high priced cosmetics? Maybe it's because it's French bread and this cosmetic line has a French name and combining the two will transport my mind, and purse to Paris! Whatever the reason, women flock to the cosmetic counter to once again, buy promises of beauty and leave with a \$2.50 loaf of slightly stale French bread!

Food motivates! Good merchandising techniques motivate as well.

What new techniques are you using to attract your customers? What motivates your customers? Do you even know? Have you tried something different and evaluated their reaction. Sometimes you have to be a little crazy to win the attention of your customers. You also have to be crazy not to. Doggie cookies, French bread, free samples, what is it that you can do different in your business. Customer service isn't about providing the expected; it's about providing the unexpected! Pass the butter!

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