

Six seconds and counting

Six seconds doesn't seem like much time. But, in fact, that's the amount of time it takes for your typical customers to make critical judgments about your store and whether it meets their needs and expectations. I refer to the six seconds as the "foodservice customer's decision matrix."

It goes like this:

> In two seconds, a customer decides what you stand for.

> During the next two seconds, he draws a conclusion about your customer service, relationships and whether you are friendly.

> In the last two seconds, the customer determines if you are a credible retailer of fresh foods.

From the store's front entry, the customer can see your graphics, interact with the staff at the check-out counter and view product displays, as well as store fixtures, finishes, colors—in essence, everything about a store's image and positioning. This front-entry view provides the customer with high-level visual messages of where products/product categories are located in the store.

Upon reaching the foodservice area, the customer once again makes a decision in another six seconds, interpreting your food graphics, the product assortment, merchandising, packaging, fixtures—everything. The customer decides if the store is

clean. Do the products look fresh? Are there enough products displayed, and are they displayed with gusto and creativity, thus making the statement that you are truly in the food business? Hence, are you a credible purveyor of fresh foods? If so, in six seconds, the customer will make his purchase decision.

The shopping experience

Let's be honest. You may be passionate about your business, but is this passion truly reflected at store level in the shopping

experience your customers have each time they shop one of your stores?

A truth in food retailing is that no matter what products you are selling, no matter

how you bring them to market and no matter how you are strategically managing your business from a category perspective, the time will come when your customers will tire of whatever it is you are selling and you will need to refresh and revitalize the offer and shopping experience. So whether your business is solid and growing or sliding, be sure to recognize the consumers are key and be humble in judging their shopping experience. I take a simple view that successful foodservice purveyors are those that get closest to what the customers truly value.

The challenge

Today's competitive convenience and gaso-

line retail environment is expected to continue to challenge retailers in creating compelling shopping experiences for their customers. Surviving and growing in this intense environment requires getting category management principles and processes right—the right product assortment, the right place, the right price, at the right time.

Reappraising your customers' perceptions of your foodservice offer and their shopping experience is a key first step in developing a unique foodservice leadership platform. I challenge you to evaluate your store's positioning and the typical shopping experience, but from a customer's perspective.

Take one step inside the door of a typical store. From this vantage point, what do you stand for? Can you clearly see where the foodservice area is located? At each foodservice station, critically judge if your store is clean, if your product assortment and merchandising efforts offer a unique range and create a positive pull, giving customers a solid reason for becoming dedicated, loyal shoppers.

By focusing on the customer and the real drivers of the foodservice customer's value set, you can break through current barriers, creating a sustainable, unique and compelling store experience. ■



See your store as others see it to get a fair reflection of what your store looks like.

Maurice Minno (mminno@b2bSolutionsLLC.com) is a consulting partner with b2b Solutions, a business facilitation organization that helps retailers and suppliers understand and accomplish their goals in the convenience / retail petroleum channel. He is the former senior marketing director for Wawa Inc. and former vice president of fresh foods for Starbucks Coffee Co.