

# DESTINATION BUSINESS

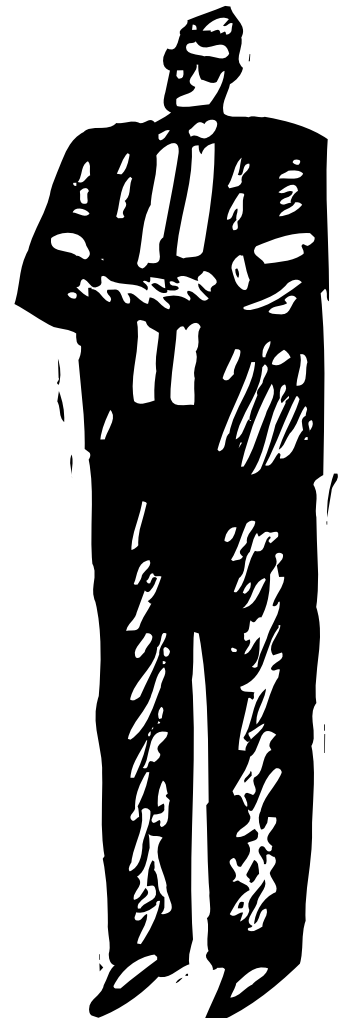
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## WHAT DO I SEE WHEN I WALK IN?

Someone asked me recently what specifically I look for when I walk in a business, to determine if it is struggling or thriving. It took me a while to realize that I specifically look at eight (8) different indicators that give me a feel as to whether a store is operating as a Destination most effectively. Let me share this list with you:

1. Does the exterior of the business convey a clear message to customers of what business it is in? This one is very subjective, but I think every consumer wonders: What is this business? What are they trying to sell me? Do I need it? If as I approach a business, that business is not effectively projecting to the world its core business purpose, it is not capitalizing on the walk-by and drive-by traffic that could be lured into the business.
2. What is the overall atmosphere and cleanliness of the business, both from the exterior and interior? All customers judge a business in three initial ways: by sight, by sound, and by smell, in that order. I believe these happen nearly instantaneously, but this quick gut check by a consumer is not unlike the “flight or fight” reaction of any organism, which judges something new for the first time. But with shoppers, there is no flight reaction. There’s only the initial decision as to whether the consumer will enter this business, or will the consumer flee this business without giving it his or her valuable time.

As part of the judging of the atmosphere of a business, sight kicks in immediately. A consumer begins by visually glancing at the dominant wall (usually the front right wall), and the dominant aisle (whatever fixture appears first in the entryway), of the business. Then, our ears make a judgment for us, and then, our nose chimes in. Because of these three senses, I think it's imperative an owner back far enough away from their business to really perceive what a customer is seeing in these first 7 seconds. If those perceptions are not what you intended, better change those aspects of your interior. If an incorrect assumption anchors to a consumer, you are losing money because of this small amount of time.



3. I believe these first 7 seconds are so critical, that they can either make or break a customer's intent to linger in the business longer. These 7 seconds are also the only times that you have to catch a new prospect who is entering your doors, and convey to them your unique business differences. This initial reaction is the one time where a new prospect has opened up himself or herself to seeing your business and your marketing message. This is so critical, I discuss this repeatedly at the BootCamp, but more times than not, the initial impression is not aligned with the full potential message that could be conveyed from the business.
  4. Are there visible customer interactions occurring in the business? For me, after that first 7 seconds, my eyes go to any other customers in the business. If there aren't any other customers, I am aware that I'm all alone in here. If there are other customers in the business, I am watching to see how they are being treated, how they are being talked to, or are they being ignored. The more interactions taking place, the more likely this business will feel friendly and comfortable, which again is a clue to my subconscious, that coming in here was the right decision.
  5. Next, my focus turns to the merchandise offering of the business, and begins looking to see if the merchandise is specialized (I've never seen it before), or is it common (I've seen this everywhere). In other words, does the business carry commodity or specialty merchandise? I believe that a business wanting to bond a consumer to their unique product in the least amount of time should position their most unique product on that first glance dominant wall and aisle.
  6. Next visual cue: Inventory levels. I think every customer tries to scan a business from the entryway, in the first 12-20 feet of the front door, without committing themselves to totally entering the business. I believe inventory levels are one of the cues that either works for the business in luring the customer in further, or repels the customer and shortens their visit. I believe too little inventory allows a customer to scan the entire space and determine (often incorrectly), if this business has what they need. A fully-stocked business allows customers to say to themselves, "This business might have what I need."
- I do believe that in a small retail space, a cluttered, over-merchandised look is often best, as it causes a customer, who might otherwise make the judgment that the store is too small, to pause, and have to enter the store to look more closely. (In earlier issues, I mentioned this technique, which is used effectively by the Anthropologie chain of retail stores).
7. I am now judging whether the business I have entered understands that it takes longer to sell a product to today's consumer. I look to see if this business has positioned and displayed marketing materials for me, as a consumer, to pick up and take with me, during my time in the business, and to take with me, as I leave the business. Why is this important to me? Well, it used to be that an owner had to rely on the customer to return to the business to do business and spend their money. Not anymore. Now, customers can browse a store, and they can leave, but still do business at home, via a telephone, by using a catalog, by accessing the Internet, or by faxing in an order. Combine this with the reality that today's consumer wants time to make purchasing judgments on their own time, and not be rushed to decide, means that an owner today must have marketing materials for customers to take with them. The proactive business owner understands

this, and has marketing materials at the register, throughout the floorspace, and maybe being handed out by the employees on the floor. They don't just have a pile of materials displayed in the corner, hoping a customer will find them. There is a strategic plan to distribute and an organized placement of marketing materials in the most proactive, aggressive businesses today.

8. Finally, I look at the organization or disorganization of the nerve center of the business, which usually means the front counter, the cash register area, or the main desk. I stand facing that area and look to see what the consumer would see. If this is where a customer makes their final purchase, I look to see if the last image they are receiving of the business is one of chaos or calm.

I remember vividly a business I worked with in Delaware. This retailer prided herself on taking special orders for her customers. The owner worked behind the counter, at the cash register, quite a bit. When I brought the owner over to the customer's side of the counter, and had her look at the view of her disorganized chaos behind the register, she was shocked. It looked like a hurricane had blown through this part of the store. I was convinced that if any special ordering was occurring here, that her customers were also hoping privately that this owner didn't lose their order in her mound of paperwork, catalogs, and Post-it notes.

***How can these 8 points help you?*** Take this list, and look at your business, using these guidelines. If you don't feel like you can be objective, have one of your business neighbors read the list, and evaluate you. That's a reality check. Don't be defensive, or you won't get the accurate feedback and criticism that could really help you. Just let your neighbor tell you exactly what he or she sees. If you have any eye-opening discoveries, act on them and start making changes.