



THE CHALLENGE OF BEING CHOSEN- WHO'S IN CONTROL?

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The theme for this year's RAC defines the most critical key to success in the competitive 2001 retail marketplace. It's certainly not about running a promotion or sales to snag a customer and lure him or her into your store. Today's customers tend to know in advance where they are going to buy- note we said buy not shop.

Each category of merchandise may have only one viable choice on that customer's mental shopping list. Becoming that choice and maintaining that top-of-mind position is what branding is all about. Branding has become an over-used word describing the key to retail marketing.

As a result, many companies forget what defines and establishes a brand. Many think it's a new, more contemporary logo, a new slogan or theme line, a new ad campaign, or a new store design. All these may be part of the branding strategy, but it's the relationship that a store or company has with its customers that determines the strength of the brand.

It is not what the company says it is, but rather what the customer thinks it is that determines a brand. If the brand makes a favorable feeling in the customer's gut and pushes the store's name (and the feelings that go with it) to the top of the customer's mind, then the choice of who gets the customer's dollar is guaranteed.

But it doesn't happen by accident. Top-of-mind awareness is the result of a well-developed and communicated brand strategy. Because effective branding is the art of being chosen...

Chosen by the right customers- the ones who will be profitable and loyal.

Chosen over the competition- because you offer a better value and have a better relationship with the customer.

Chosen by the right store associates- those who like your business and like your customers. (And you have chosen them based on your strategy and criteria.)

"Total Brand Integration"® - addresses the challenge of getting the right people to provide the right value to the right customers. A communication challenge? No doubt. One that we believe belongs high on the marketing leader's job description. If it isn't, it should be. Why?

Because, being a strong brand means being the one store on the top of a customer's mental shopping list. As important, it means being the one company or store that potential employees have on their mental employment opportunity list.

It's a challenge. The challenge of being chosen to link and sync employees, customers, and value. When you make this happen it becomes the difference between being a brand or being just another store.

