

Creating an Experience

Building a relationship with your customer online and in-store is paramount

By Marshall Marcovitz

Recent U.S. Commerce Department data show that American consumers are spending more of their money on eating out, fixing up their homes, upgrading their cars and paying for sports gear, health and beauty.

The Internet is filled with Buy Experiences, Not Things stories. Especially among the younger demographic — the 20- and 30-year olds who would rather spend on vacations, eating out and health club memberships — not merely things.

This shift in behavior isn't really that new. When I started *The Chef's Catalog* many years ago (one of the first catalogs to go online), my unique selling proposition was that you could share the secrets of the world's greatest chefs. Chefs appeared in the catalog and shared their culinary experiences and signature recipes with my consumer audience, creating a community of serious cooks.

Today, selling the experience and creating a unique community for your customers are paramount. Apple knows what scientists have known for a long time: Experience — not objects — brings the most happiness. Make an appointment at the Genius Bar in an Apple store and you can get all your technology questions answered. While you're in the store, you just might buy some new software, an external hard drive, a new iPad or even an Apple watch. Online you can have an experience that reflects the brand's ethos. The consumer is buying the experience of being happily immersed in the technology community and learning new ideas in a lively, interesting store. Apple is selling the experience, which, of course, leads to selling things!

Another successful company that focuses on the experiential concept is Eataly. (*TGR* profiled the retail-restaurant hybrid concept in the April/May 2014 issue.) Eataly positions the retail store with three key words: Eat. Shop. Learn.

- **Eat.** The U.S. stores in New York and Chicago include seven restaurants.
- **Shop.** The store and website feature artisanal specialty foods, gourmet housewares and cookbooks and more.
- **Learn.** Inside the store is a cooking school, La Scuola Di Eataly.

Eataly combines the eating, shopping and learning

experience to create the look, feel and culinary experience of a food arcade in Italy. What a grand time you'll have drinking and dining Italian-style on fish, pasta, pizza and more. Shop for the equipment famous cooks and chefs use to create their tantalizing meals, and learn the secrets of successful chefs by attending their cooking classes. A large selection of cookbooks is incorporated into the presentations.

Shopping at the Eataly online store is a positive experience. The site loads quickly and is chock-full of crisp photography of attractive products. Here are a few brief reasons why I liked this well-designed site:

- It's easy to read the black type on a clean white background and the clear graphics.
- The two retail stores and Shop Online are prominently featured.
- The toolbar lists nine items from extra virgin olive oil to classes and events.
- Eataly Magazine features stories and recipes from around the world.

Eataly, Apple and other successful companies understand that today's shoppers want to be part of the story. They want to share. They want more 'likes' for their photos on Instagram. They want that 'thumbs up' from Facebook. Apple capitalizes on this by inviting consumers to submit photographs taken with their iPhone; chosen photos are then displayed on huge billboards.

You can benefit from this trend to gain and keep your consumers' attention. You can share their recipes or photos of making a great meal at home while using your equipment — think a gallery of user-generated photos on your website, Pinterest page or Instagram feed. It can feature customer selfies and candid shots. Think of how much fun it will be for your customers to share their photos and recipes with others in your online community. **TGR**



Marshall Marcovitz is the founder and former CEO of the *Chef's Catalog*, a leading Internet shopping site. Currently, he is a lecturer, university professor and marketing consultant. In each issue of *The Gourmet Retailer*, Marcovitz offers opinions and lessons in all things Web-related, from social networking to marketing.