

# THE TELLING STORIES

## ACTION PLAN

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If there's one thing Vision Monday learned when pulling together our "Telling Stories" cover feature it's that truly connecting with consumers is ultimately what increases sales. The goal of this Action Plan is to offer tips every retailer can use to create more powerful relationships with their best advocates—the customer.

### ○ 1. Start at the top.

Retailers stand to win much more by instilling, unifying and motivating customer-inspired values in their organizations as a whole; but it has to start as a priority from the upper most levels of leadership. Whether you own a two person boutique or a regional outfit with several dozen locations, the emphasis on the importance of education, training and engaging the consumer has to come from those in charge.

### ○ 2. Determine your "value" proposition.

Since many of today's shoppers are focused on "value" determine what this means for your business. Is it offering the best product at the best price? Is it fast turnaround? Is it offering more exclusives and limited editions than anyone else? Is it addressing a niche market underserved by your competitors? Now that the term "value" is no longer dependent solely on price, you need to figure out what your value message is and who that message will resonate with.

### ○ 3. Make it all about the customer.

This may seem counter-intuitive but it's not—shoppers recognize salespeople who are looking to make the biggest sale, hit their numbers or up-sell them. This is not a consumer-centric approach to retailing. Consumers respond to salespeople who seem to sincerely have their best interests at heart. Ask about what the customer is looking for, how and when they use their eyewear, how they would describe their perfect pair of glasses and how much they can spend. Then give them what they've asked for. If you like, pull options above and below the price they quoted and tell them what they gain or lose accordingly. Consumers will purchase more expensive products if they are convinced of its value and feel they have been given the opportunity to make an educated choice.

### ○ 4. Train, train, train.

Without fail, across the board, all of the retailers we spoke to regularly provided training for their employees on selling tactics and the brands they carry. At Eyecare Centers of America (ECCA) that training takes shape as a uniform message and a designated team that travels to each location to provide education so the message remains consistent, while at Eyetique they have charged their sales reps with training the whole staff on brands and new releases, not just the frame buyer. Figure out a way to make sure all of your employees are on the same page when it comes to their product knowledge and what your store can offer.

### ○ 5. Partner with your sales reps.

That leads us to our next tip. Who knows the brands better than the sales reps who sell them? For smaller outfits and independent ECPs a "corporate-wide" approach to employee training like ECCA'S just sounds kind of ridiculous. If you only have a few sales associates or opticians it makes more sense to ask the sales reps to come in to educate the staff on the history, design attributes and unique details of each of their brands. If consumers don't feel the salesperson they are dealing with is competent to discuss the product they're trying to sell than it doesn't matter how ready they were to buy when they walked in, and they will walk out without making that purchase.

### ○ 6. Throw a party!

Everyone loves a party and an in-store event doesn't always have to be sales-centric. Now that you are relying more on our sales reps, arrange for them to come do a trunk show on a best-selling brand, or a new brand being carried so consumers can become more familiar with it. Try having a jazz trio come in once a month to spice things up. Many boutiques are now partnering with local artists to feature their work and having "openings" to introduce the artist; many even offer discounts valid only during the event. All for the cost of some mediocre wine in a plastic glass and some cheese cubes, these boutiques are getting people into their stores. Although they don't always buy right at that moment, the next time they or someone they know needs eyewear these boutiques will remain top of mind.

### ○ 7. Don't wait for them to walk in the door.

Luxtotta Retail's Kristen McCabe brought up the idea of using the viral world as a key avenue for "educating" the customer. Today's consumers are more savvy than ever and they are spending time researching online to size up different retailers and brands to figure out what would be the best choice. If you don't have a presence online you are doing yourself a huge disservice. There are enough web building and web hosting services out there to make building an attractive, informative site easier. Websites are also a great way to collect information from those who visit your page to make reaching them through email and targeted direct marketing increasingly more effective.

### ○ 8. Rethink how a shopper navigates your store.

Walking into an unfamiliar store can be intimidating. If that store isn't easy to understand or if it is hard to identify what each area is for then it's even worse. Try to look at your store through the eyes of someone who has never been there. Does the layout make sense? Are the brands easy to identify? Will the customer be comfortable exploring the store at their own pace? Can they try on some of the frames without tracking down an employee with a case key? Is your merchandising neat and up-to-date? All of these things matter to a customer and help them form their first impression of your store.

### ○ 9. Build relationships.

Your best customer is a repeat customer and a repeat customer is someone who enjoyed doing business with you. Much of this can be accomplished by inquiring into their needs and giving them something they value but recognizing the heritage cues, identifying and asking about their interests and building a rapport that goes beyond just selling them a pair of glasses helps cement it. Think of them as a stranger at a cocktail party. How would you engage that person in small talk? How would you get to know someone new? More often than not these conversations will further direct you to the type of product that will most appeal to the customer but they will definitely make the customer feel like you are seeing more than dollar signs when you look at them. If you want, take it one step further and build client cards on each person, so you can remember pertinent details about their lives next time they come in.

### ○ 10. Follow up.

Your job is not done once the credit card transaction clears. Follow up with every customer who buys. Send them a postcard or an email thanking them for their purchase, remind them of your name and business hours and let them know they are welcome to come in anytime for adjustments or corrections. Shoppers who don't make purchases are goldmines too. Leave a guest book by your door so even if they don't buy they can be kept abreast of store happenings. Ultimately, you need to compile a marketing list to inform all of them of upcoming sales and in-store events. Let them know that frame they liked is now on sale or that you've begun carrying a new brand you'd think they'd like. It's the personal touches that will get them back in your store. ■■