

Advertising is not enough

Say you want to sell something. You think: I'll place an ad to get buyers. Buyers will come, see the item and pay for it. Deal done. For simple transactions, this simple paradigm works. Take note of all the individual ads for used furniture, bikes and other stuff on Craigslist.

However, there must be more thought put in when you are trying to market for a large store, retail operation or national distributor. First, you are selling more than one item. When you are advertising for a larger operation you are trying to accomplish at least two things. One is to move product and another is to get people in your store. The idea being that if someone is there to buy 2-for-1 widgets, he or she may also buy some gadgets.

So your ad agency created a great ad, the pricing is great both for the customer and for your bottom line, and you've done a comprehensive media buy. All you have to do now is sit back and wait. Right? Wrong!

Retailers, from the smallest to the largest, have to be a bit more proactive. First, they have to make sure they have enough stock of what they are attempting to sell. Second, they have to have contingency plans if the demand is too large. Are you going to honor the same price when a new shipment arrives? Are you going to give rainchecks?

In short, advertising must be connected to your operations and customer service policies.

Let me share a misadventure I had at a well known office supply store (email me if you want the name). They had advertised a certain desk chair on sale. On the second day of the sale, I showed up at a store and wanted to buy said desk chair. The store was "out of stock." In fact, most every store in the area was out of stock. I had to ask the manager

to locate stores with the chair in stock and both had only one chair. At no point did he offer to call and have the other store hold the chair for me. The manager also did not offer to give me a coupon or the same price on a similar chair. In fact, the whole experience was illustrative of terrible customer service, but also of the disconnect between advertising and operations.

The store had advertised a sale for an item that it did not have in stock. Perhaps it was bait and switch and perhaps it was the fault of the advertising manager. Whatever the reason, it did not result in a sale, quite the opposite, it resulted in an irritated potential customer who will think twice before going to this store for anything, much less anything advertised in the weekly circular.

Advertising gets people to the door but it does not make the sale. Customer service and sales staff make the sale.

The truth is advertising alone is rarely enough.