



FEATURE

IS YOUR SHOP IN THE RIGHT SHAPE TO SELL?

WHATEVER THE STATE OF THE economy people still need fuel in their vehicles and petrol retailers have a captive audience crossing their forecourts every day.

Consumers need to buy fuel so there is a real opportunity here for convenience retailing to maximise returns with the clever use of store layout and design.

With this in mind, FORECOURT magazine asked Beswick Design Managing Director Chris Hayward to look at the trends and potential for forecourt retailing in 2009.

Chris said: "In purchasing petrol, there is an 'accepted filling time'. People expect to wait while they fill their vehicle before walking through a shop, queue and then pay. Forecourts have a ready, waiting, audience. So how do fuel retailers maximise this opportunity and generate interest and impulse buys?"

"Even a small investment in the layout of your shop, with the right approach and experience, can show immediate and considerable returns. Start by finding out how things are working in your business now, and what you want to work better. Then do your research.

"You need to understand your customers, why they visit when they do, and what they want when they come in.

"This insight into their timing, circumstances, habits and preferences should directly correlate with your strategy

for layout, category management, merchandising and promotions.

"Your shop needs to be able to respond to the rushed salesperson looking for something quick for their lunch, to the busy mum topping up her groceries. Consider the product zones and which products go next to what, to tempt different groups to complementary products. Putting cat food next to light bulbs is unlikely to strike a cord with anyone.

"On the forecourt, as customers enter your store to pay and move from outside to inside, the merchandising begins instantaneously. You have only a short opportunity to grab their attention and get across to them a sales message that is relevant and clear.

"Food offerings, for example, are a key potential area for the industry. If managed well and as an integrated part of a wider offer, it opens further opportunities as people broaden their experience of the brand. The more time people spend in-store – so long as they are not frustrated by over-long queues – the more they will spend on 'impulse' buys.

"From the approach to the pumps to the fast lane through the store, there are many opportunities for you to 'talk' to customers. Communications are as important as merchandising. Experience has taught us the power of identifying focussed key messages then getting across clear, consistent and relevant information to the right people at the right time.

"On one of our recent projects, the fundamental task was to convert forecourt customers to customers of the food service sub-brand. We developed a cohesive solution from entry to exit, making impact in a limited space, raising awareness from outside, then simplifying the journey through the store, building the right environment to appeal to customers.

"We also draw on the retail knowledge from other sectors, using constructive elements such as the 'accepted waiting time' spaces at Argos, to waiting for a coffee in Starbucks. The more positive the staff-customer interaction, the greater the satisfaction and potential sales.

"You need to make sure that everything in your shop works together and that one sales or purchasing opportunity doesn't compete with or override another. For example, you don't want a fantastic off-shelf promotional display to block visibility or access to café offers. We believe in working closely not just with the retailer but that building relationships and cross-functional teams with their suppliers is to everyone's benefit.

"Service stations are conveniently located by their nature. You have not only the passing traffic, but a chance to build a 'destination' store with local or regular customers. If you are focussed and know your audience you can ensure you have something different or special to draw people in. This applies whether you are an independent or a chain that needs to build a consistent experience to generate loyalty." 