

# Business Idea Zone



## Footfall

*Every business needs this information – put it into action and see your inventory fly!*

Travis Kircher contributor, Retail Customer Experience magazine. This article was originally published in Retail Customer Experience magazine, April 2008. [Click here](#) to download a free PDF version.



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Don't look now, but someone is watching you. Don't be alarmed. The shabby guy isn't there to take your wallet and the man behind the camera isn't "Big Brother." They only are observing your shopping behavior. It's all part of a move by some retailers to track customers as they move through their stores.

### Traffic pattern

Georganne Bender is a retail consultant and co-founder of consulting firm Kizer and Bender. Bender, along with her business partner, Rich Kizer, frequently advises store owners on how to create a store layout that is easy to navigate. She says it's a mistake for retailers simply to place products in their store in random order. "Good retailers absolutely do not leave merchandising to chance," she said. "It's something that they're thinking about and it's something that evolves every day. And it's not something that customers dictate to them. It's vice versa."

### Retail cartographers

How can a store map its traffic patterns? Industry leaders say there are a variety of methods.

"The most efficient way is to put an observer in to note the patterns of people — the way that people enter the store and go through — on a sampling basis," said Eugene Fram, a marketing professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology's Philip Saunders College of Business. "What you're trying to do is look for hot and cold spots — areas of high density of traffic," Smyth said. Once the current traffic pattern has been identified, Smyth says retailers can try modifying the layout of their store to increase sales.

### Traffic laws

Consumers on foot, like drivers of motor vehicles, adhere to certain rules or patterns. It helps to identify these rules when designing a store. For example, research conducted by noted industry expert Paco Underhill has suggested that, when given a choice, the vast majority of consumers will turn right after entering a store. That research was explained in detail in Underhill's book, "Why We Buy, The Science of Shopping".

Other research points to a psychological barrier that exists approximately 15 feet within the front door of a box retailer. Dubbed "the decompression zone," in this space it is rare for an ad or product to catch the eye of entering consumers,

according to Bender. “We were in a store last week where they had a pretty jam-packed decompression zone, including this sign where they talked about how they were this national award-winning store,” she said.

When Bender and the store owner counted the number of people who stopped to look the sign and other things in that area, the owner realized that, **although they had many wonderful things there, the sales on those products were not good, people were not signing up for programs advertised there, nor were they even reading the signs — because they never saw them.** The area just beyond the decompression zone, on the other hand, is a prime location for what Bender calls “speed bumps” — hot products and cool displays that get the customer’s attention and slow down their movement through the store.

### **Traffic penalties**

Just as drivers can face serious penalties if they disregard traffic regulations, retailers who don’t pay attention to shoppers’ traffic patterns can wind up suffering. Brown says **retailers who don’t identify and act on shopper behavior ultimately will lose dollars.** “The risk is that you say sales are down, but you don’t know the right lever to pull,” he said. “So you end up either taking too long to figure out which lever to pull or consistently pulling the wrong ones, and as a result, losing sales and losing market.”

Bender agrees, adding that the store that has identified its traffic patterns is a store that can respond quickly to changes in customer behavior. “When you get a blueprint like that, you have a discipline and you know that **you need to change the speed bumps at least every two weeks.** You need to change your end caps monthly. You need to change your lifestyle displays at least once a month. **You need to change your windows at least once a month,**” she said. “So it sort of holds your feet to the fire and you know you have deadlines and when you have to change things.”

Hoy’s thoughts: What are the ‘hotspots’ in your store? Do you combine tool displays with finished product? Move your inventory to different locations. Glass colors can be moved and recombined.

Just as major big box stores do not change their complete layout frequently, you don’t need to either. But they do change the hotspots frequently. Discover that area in your store and keep it fresh. Combine the old goodies with new ideas for inspiration. Combine finished products in new ways or move where they are displayed. Embrace change in your business!

**Looking for ways to drive new traffic to your store?** Ed Hoy’s is looking for you! We are looking for a limited number of businesses that are interesting in partnering with us to evaluate a new method of marketing. Designed to drive traffic through your doors, this method allows you to market to a self – defined demographic group and requires no specialized skills. **Please contact me by Monday, March 23 to be considered for partnership.**

Continued Success,

*Maria*

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