

THE UNEXPECTED

Magic & Retail: A Surprising Duo in Creating Customer Experiences

by Nicole Leinbach Reyhle

Magic, as defined by Wikipedia, is a performing art that entertains audiences by staging tricks or creating illusions of seemingly impossible feats using natural means. While not quite the same definition of retail, this sounds surprisingly similar to a retailer's responsibility as far as we're concerned. After all, merchants strive to entertain their audiences... aka customers... by merchandising (vs. staging) and creating

displays (vs. illusions) with natural means (their products). With this in mind, we couldn't help but wonder what tricks of the trade retailers could learn from a magician.

Scott Piner, an Illinois based magician who has a passion for both magic and independent retail, offered his thoughts on how retail and magic go hand-in-hand.

Magic and retail seem like an unlikely duo, yet that really isn't the case. What can you tell us about what magic and retail have in common?

Magicians love to learn every trick known to man and there are literally thousands upon thousands of tricks. The trick is (pun intended) finding what kind of magic fits your personality and style. This is just like retail. What kind of retail fits your style? Find your niche, do it well, and stay true to you. A magician or a retailer, this is key in creating a long-lasting business that keeps customers – or in my case, audiences – happy.

We love that! How did you get into magic anyway?

One Christmas, I received a magic kit. I believe I was eight years old, and I remember opening a magic booklet which contained 100 secrets to magic. My love affair grew as I learned the tricks which belonged only to me. I had three sisters and this gift required no sharing, but I was able to entertain my sisters with the tricks. I still have that magic booklet to this day and remember my first trick.

That's a great story. Speaking of tricks, what tricks of the trade of magic do you think retailers could learn from?

I think there are several principles that closely align among retailers and magicians. For me, there is nothing greater than having an impactful, authentic and great “opener” at any performance I do, similar to that of a customer being greeted memorably as they walk into a store. I have to know who I am as the magician and entertainer and deliver to that promise – the same way a retailer should, as well. Typically when I perform, I have 30 to 45 minutes where I need to engage the audience throughout, but it starts with a strong opener and connecting with the audience. For the magician or business owner, you must know your audience, serve your customer, and deliver your promise from the moment you have their attention.

That's a great point! Every second... including that very first one... counts. So out of curiosity, what is your favorite trick?

The illusion effect, or trick, is my favorite. That said, I do not desire to trick my audience because I do not want my audience to feel foolish. My favorite trick is one that fools me! I love watching other magicians and wondering how in the world they did that! My favorite magician growing up was David Copperfield and watching him make buildings vanish, planes or helicopters disappear, or even seeing him fly on stage was always very cool. While I have a few choice card tricks that I love to perform, I enjoy the opportunity to watch others perform magic, as well.

Magic truly captivates the attention of folks from all ages. Why do you think this is? How do you think retailers can mimic this?

I think there is a natural curiosity in all of us about “what if”. As children, we're always growing and when we see magic as a child, our creative thinking and curiosity grows. As we age, I think we're brought back to that youthful spirit and sense of wonder. I think retailers can learn from this by creating an experience for their customers. In magic, we have to create a new experience each time. Whether I've performed the same trick 258 times or if it's the seventh show in ten days, I have to remember that my audience is seeing the show or the trick for the first time. Performing requires you to connect each moment with your audience and to share that experience with them for the first time. In retail, there is great opportunity to make that first impression, connect, and serve the customer with authenticity and genuine interest each and every time you connect. I consider it a privilege to be able to share this “what if” spirit through my performances and think retailers can embrace this, as well.

Well said, Scott. Thank you!

5 Tips Retailers Can Learn From Magic

by Scott Piner, Magician & Independent Retailer Advocate

Magic is fun and entertaining. Magic is about making people laugh and experience something new while connecting with an audience in an effort to make them laugh, smile, wonder, question, ooh and ahhh, and have a feel-good time through interaction. In retail, this is much the same. You want to connect with your customer and you want the customer to walk away feeling happy, satisfied and fulfilled. Retailers who excel at making in-store experiences fun will undoubtedly see more satisfied customers.

Magic has an element of surprise. Does your retail do the same? Magicians mostly follow a rule of “never show your audience the same trick twice.” As a magician, I have a job to entertain that is carried out through a sequence of events that tell a story and thrill, surprise, or humor the audience. It's important I am inspired by what I offer them or my audience will see through the make-believe. As a retailer, you also need to trust your product in order to sell it while still offering your customers a sense of wonder and surprise. This combination keeps both you and your audience engaged.

Know your audience. I have had great shows and not so great shows, and the not so great ones were mostly because I wasn't prepared for my audience. Knowing your audience as a performer is absolutely vital in delivering a great show. Likewise, knowing your audience as a retailer is vital in creating sales. With retail, you may not always know who will walk in your front door, but you can greet them, ask questions and then help meet their needs.

Finally, offering a great opener and a great closer is a key part of any magic performance. These two moments allow me to capture and keep attention, as well as leave my audience with a positive memory of their experience. Retail, like magic, allows demands a great opening and closing experience. Strive to capture your customers' attention and then give them something they'll remember!