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How to Improve Your Counter Encounters

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The clearly branded service counter at Lyle's TV & Appliance in Elkhorn, Wis., checks off all the right boxes.

By Lyn M. Falk, Retailworks, Inc.

A service counter is often one of the first things customers see when they enter a store. It's often the first point of reference.

In contrast, a *checkout* counter is often the last point of interaction a customer has with a business before leaving the premises. So, these transaction counters had better provide a good first impression and/or a strong lasting one!

All counters should be well branded, visually appealing and highly functional for both the customer and the employee. Consider this checklist to determine if your transaction counters are making the most of their real estate:

Tasks: Determine what tasks your employees perform at your service counter, i.e., processing transactions (purchases and returns), providing information to customers, shipping and receiving, answering calls, and doing paperwork. Is the area set up to complete these tasks efficiently and ergonomically? Is the area well lit? Are anti-fatigue mats needed to help those standing for long periods of time? Remember, a satisfied and energized employee is a better salesperson.

Branding: Does the look of the counter match your brand? Do the front and top sections reflect your company's color or finish scheme? Is it identifiable from a distance or is a "Check Out/Service Here" sign necessary? Your customers should never have to search for your transaction counter.

Customer Amenities: How do your customers interact with the counter? Is there a place to put one's smaller purchases and an area for a customer's handbag? Is seating needed for longer consultations and/or filling out paperwork?

Signage: Are all your signs easy to read, branded and up to date with your latest policies? Always have your logo front and center, and a list of services you provide that the customer may be unaware of, such as special orders, re-upholstering, room set-up, interior design, custom designs, or cross-country shipping.

Queue Courtesy: Consider how shoppers are approaching the counter and lining up. Do they know where to stand? What entertains them while they're waiting in line? Keep consumers engaged by playing a video about your store on a video display while they wait.

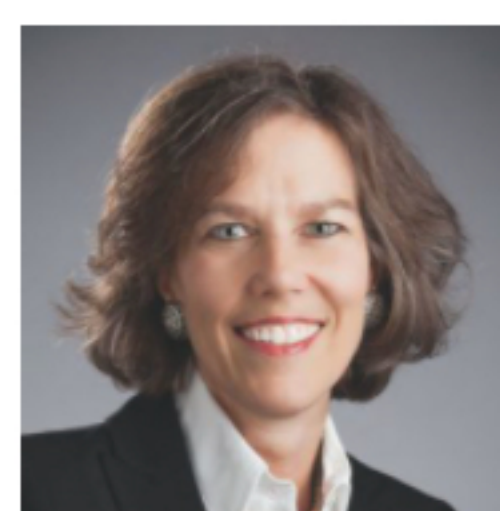
Impulse Items: If you display impulse products, present them in well-designed containers of the same size and material. Too many items in multiple containers will distract the eye and *not* help you sell these impulse items.

Incidentals: Place gift cards, company brochures and business cards on the counter to promote your brand, products and services.

Bag It: For smaller items, be sure to provide branded shopping bags for the purchases.

It's possible that the ongoing development of touchless checkout technologies may eliminate the traditional role of the checkout counter. However, for larger purchases like appliances, furniture and mattresses, there is often more information that needs to be conveyed such as financing options, delivery and installation details, and extended warranties options, which will continue to require some form of consult area at checkout.

Regardless of the tasks performed, it's important to pay attention to these areas of transaction, as they are the part of the shopping experience that does indeed shape first and last impressions.



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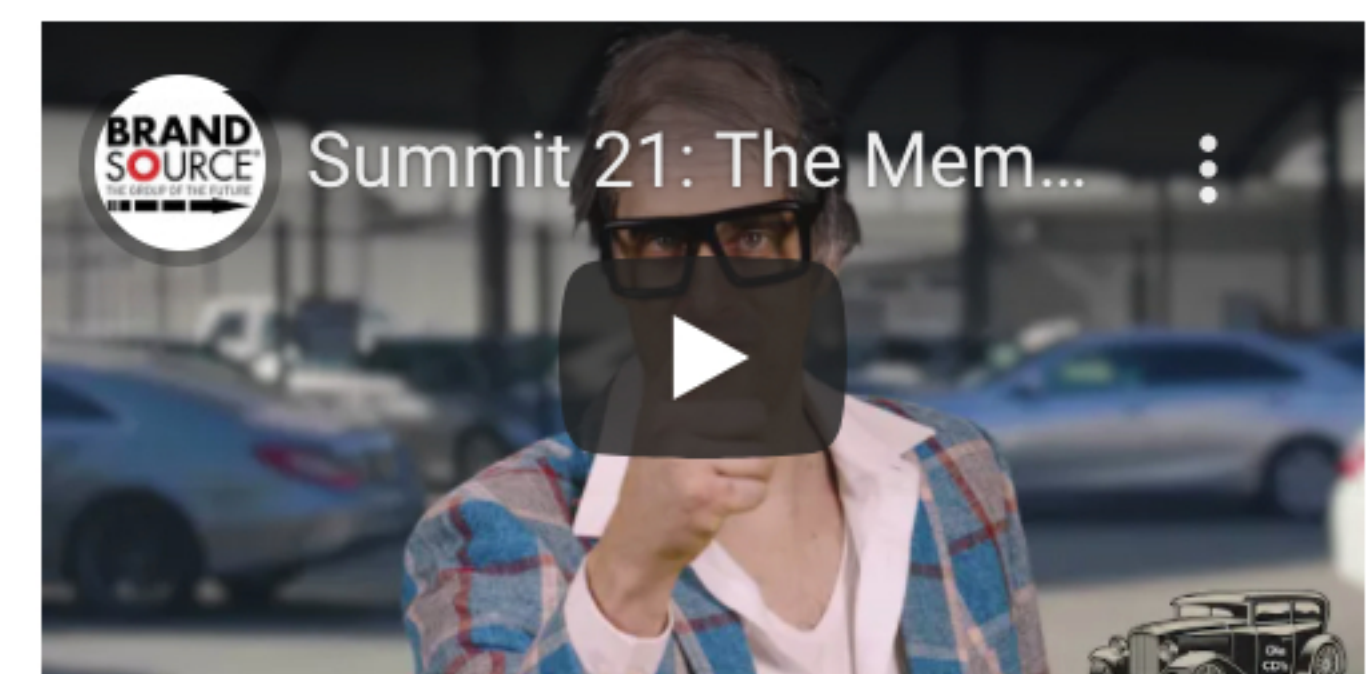
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Let the Good Times Roll: Best Buy raised its forecast for the year amid "extraordinarily high" demand for kitchen appliances and consumer tech. [CNBC](#)

COVID's Consequences: Analysts expect many consumer behaviors that were adopted during the pandemic to stick around over the longer term, and urge retailers and vendors to closely monitor shoppers' changing needs. [NPD Group](#)

COVID's Consequences, Part II: A recent survey of millennials and Gen-Zers shows that 90 percent have no interest in returning to the office full time. [ZDNet](#)

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