

RUG INSIDER

RUGS AND CARPETS
FOR THE DESIGN PROFESSIONAL

Spring 2018 - Volume XXI - ISSUE 4

CARE AND CLEANING

+

Flood Zone

InSTYLE | Market Introductions

Proper Care and Cleaning

Insider NEWS | Winning Carpets

High Point and The Rug Show

InFOCUS | Being Green

Cause for Change

InPERSPECTIVE | Viscose

Meet Exquisite Rugs!

In the Spotlight | Moroccan Redux



Introspective | CAUSE FOR CHANGE

Cause for Change

BY ARIC H. MORRISON

RUG INSIDER is pleased to welcome internationally-read author and motivational speaker Aric Morrison to share his insights which, while not directly about rugs and carpets, relate closely to the industry. Morrison is a principal Partner at Meredith and Main Development Group.

IMAGES: IMAGE OF IMAGE OF ARIC MORRISON COURTESY OF MR. MORRISON. DETAIL IMAGE OF COLOR POMS AT PAIGE ALBRIGHT ORIENTALS, RUG INSIDER FILE.

As I was hurrying through this thing called "life" the other day, a previous customer of mine whom I had not seen in quite some time approached me. Her name is Eva, and I had done business with her for years and years. She was a customer that I had known fairly well, but there really wasn't anything exceptional about our business dealings together. The initial conversation with her was pretty light as we exchanged the typical pleasantries that people do after seeing one another for the first time after being away.

I had made my living in a highly competitive retail business, and my livelihood was dependent upon being nimble in that ever evolving and fast paced environment. My products were such that at times, they almost put me at a competitive disadvantage because they were quickly becoming available in other business outlets and

avenues. In short, we were all trying to sell a similar product in the marketplace and struggled constantly to retain our loyal base.

Like we all do, I had blindly made many false assumptions that my business would continue to thrive, via my "willingness" to constantly change our portfolio of goods. The reality was however... that service, price and convenience, was only sustainable for so long before being replicated by someone else in the same business, which might have had me in their crosshairs.

This constant ebb and flow continued for years, until the market crash of 2008 happened which completely changed the business model. For the first time in twenty years, I began to feel my own "business mortality", and it most assuredly was not a pleasant realization.

At that time, amidst a sharp decline in consumer spending, and unemployment rates that were soaring, as a businessperson my journey to remain relevant became paramount to my future survival. If the business was going to have any chance to remain afloat, my brand would have to be perceived differently. Truth be told, my business sense had actually become somewhat blind to reality and a bit complacent to forward thinking in terms of looking at how to position it for sustained success. However, in the very troubled 2008 economy, there was no other choice but to change.

I had never taken for granted having such a loyal customer base, but I also rarely (if ever) took the time to step back and actually look at how my business was perceived, in the eyes of those same consumers. So much focus had been placed on what I was selling, but very little on what would make people want to continue to purchase from me. If disposable income was going to be such that people would pause and take a longer look at each dollar being spent, I had to make certain that those same people would want to select me as a continued trusted business entity worthy of their hard earned cash.

After looking at consumer trends and analyzing many other business models, there seemed to be one thing that other successful businesses at that time all had in common. It was a point of differentiation that they used to their advantage to not only remain relevant, but more importantly to connect in an emotional and almost visceral way with their customers. They, had already gone through the process of looking at their 'brand' perception, and in many instances had repositioned themselves for the future.

Each of the businesses that I had studied, were committed to supporting a particular social cause. Many of them actually became known for their charitable endeavors and in turn, increased their business base by

broadly appealing to consumers through these charitable acts. It was truly a win-win for the business and for the customer. It was a very basic concept of giving more and selling more. As consumers shopped for products, they also were spending much time considering what social responsibility was also being represented by the companies and businesses that were selling them. The synergy between a business and a social cause, made complete sense to me the more I understood and researched the various places that I had shopped.

Armed with this new knowledge, I set out to position my company in such a way that would allow customers to know that I was "giving back" regularly to a preferred charity that was very dear to me. I had created a campaign that was synonymous with my business and support for a local Children's Hospital. It wasn't a hard transi-

tion, I was a business owner—I already had the potential to reach people. Up until that time, I had never even considered using my business as a platform to elicit positive change.

It didn't take much, but the evolution of my customer base was quickly realized and the business thrived. Some ten years later, I'm very proud that my brand stood for something, but ashamed that it took me so long to realize the obvious.

Today, most business owners are all associated with a particular cause in some way, shape or form. Portion of proceeds, charity events, auctions and donations are all part of the current retail landscape. For those businesses



Aric H. Morrison

that aren't yet connected to a social cause, community action or charitable endeavor, I often wonder, why?

// The reality was however... that service, price and convenience, was only sustainable for so long before being replicated by someone else in the same business, which might have had me in their crosshairs. //

My brand, reputation and customer base has all come together and made a small difference in the world. It really took nothing more than a blend of empathy and common sense. I cannot imagine a world without them.

So, as my conversation with Eva came to a close that day it ended up with me being reminded of all of the good that we had done with our donations. She mentioned our support for the Children's Hospital and how much she appreciated what we as a business had stood for. We had come full circle. My customer was actually "Thanking" me. And as a business owner... that was really nice to hear.

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