

Make the store a place for the tribe to meet

By [Graham Leigh](#)

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Human beings are social creatures who, for the most part, love feeling “part of the crowd” — but not many local brands are capitalising on this innate human need to belong.

Given that research shows the average shopper is exposed to about 3000 messages a day, brands have to find a way to entrench their relationship with their customers. It's all very well using the traditional media space to raise awareness, but once that's done, then what?

Tribal retailing

SA's changing retail landscape is creating additional challenges for retail brands. The proliferation of strip malls and small niche centres is making it harder for brands to attract and keep loyal customers. Retailers and brand owners need to relate to customers, and tribal retailing or a “community of purpose” can be created by offering consumers value added services from within the retail space, at point of purchase.

For example: buy your 4x4 here and you can join our next bush trip — Land Rover, Mitsubishi and the like all do it well. The value-add may be as simple as continued e-mail and web communication on events, happenings, club cards, loyalty programmes and, of course, product upgrades.

The core consumer proposition is that through buying this particular product I will have access to the lifestyle and be part of that crowd. This is matched with retailers' need to retain customers and drive word of mouth — less expensive and more effective than prospecting and advertising.

The importance of the retail space here is that it's the place where the promise of the tribe becomes tangible, so it becomes a stage for the values and attributes of the brand. It's where the rubber hits the road in terms of brand behaviour and consumer decision, and is undeniably a powerful customer relationship marketing tool.

Extended engagement

The experience of purchase needs to be extended to engage the tribe in an ongoing relationship — this is where virtual media play an important role. Brand portals like websites and blogs can talk to the tribe continually and advise them of offerings and get-togethers.

Some brands have started down the road using fairly effective loyalty programmes and direct marketing campaigns, but it's

the tip of the iceberg. I'm talking about developing intense brand loyalty and a sense of belonging to a tribe that has its own unique culture, customs and even language. The aim is to attract followers who are faithful and passionate. Where would Harley Davidson sales be without the HOG (Harley Owners Group)?

A key aspect is the creation of a dynamic and accurate customer relationship management database and strategy; the use of this information is pivotal to the “tribe” strategy. Consumers should be delighted to provide contact details, such is their eagerness to be part of the tribe.

Tribal base

The retail space needs to be able to facilitate the gathering of this information. The store needs to be the meeting place of the tribe — a point where they can touch base with the brand they are passionate about. It's the primary point of contact and hopefully the transaction space.

Basic attractions such as a climbing wall in an adventure store, or live fashion shows in a clothing shop, or cooking demos in a grocery shop, all function as a magnet, but the opportunities extend beyond this. We have to create a sense of belonging, a desire to be part of the action. Tribe members should always be anticipating the next attraction.

The quality and consistency of all brand interactions is crucial. They have to be commensurate with the tribe's culture. Disgruntled tribe members are easily persuaded to switch allegiance.

Savvy stores

A store that got it right is Wal-Mart Germany, which organised “singles shopping” on Friday nights. All singles put big red bows on their trolleys to identify themselves and received discounts on goods such as chocolates and champagne.

Locally, Cell C has created a number of dynamic brand spaces, such as the latest high end addition in Sandton City, which features dynamic lighting and decor to punt the brand values and aspirational appeal.

The Clicks Club card provides discounts to members, who feature in a massive countrywide database. This relationship is consolidated via a monthly newsletter and ad-hoc special discount days.

Exclusive Books holds key events for Fanatics members such as one-on-one signings and readings for children.

We've seen some good starts to retail tribalism in SA, and our fair share of false starts. What brands really need to do is get their consumers beating the brand's drum while they beat a path into their stores.

Source: Business Day

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