



PLAYFUL CONSTRUCTS

Toy Kingdom's Modern Take on Experiential Retailing

It has already been a widely accepted fact for both retailers and consumers that it is no longer enough to simply fill your store with merchandise and expect them to sell. Year after year, retailers come up with innovative strategies to attract customers and entice them to buy in order to increase sales. One strategy that seems to yield positive effects on sales is experiential retailing.

Defined by authors Y. Kim, P. Sullivan and J.C. Forney in their book, *Experiential Retailing: Concepts and Strategies That Sell* (2007), experiential retailing is a “strategy that transforms products and services into a total consumption experience. It satisfies emotional or expressive desires, as well as rational

or functional needs of the consumer.” Simply put, the experiential retailing strategy transforms and elevates the mundane act of purchasing into a pleasurable shopping experience by employing an exciting retail environment. Stimulating store interiors, interactive technology, and attractive merchandise display cause customers to become absorbed in the delight of their shopping venture, increasing consumer intentions to visit and make purchases in the store. Although the experiential format proves to be effective, retailers may have a tendency of having too much of it, causing a possible decrease in the store's efficiency, functionality, and flexibility.

Opening its first store in 1991, mass merchandising toy store Toy Kingdom embraced the concept of

experiential retailing by employing a popular retail design trend in the 90s—themed store environments. Toy Kingdom initially had a Disneyland-themed store with a huge tree in the middle surrounded by the different “worlds” that corresponded to the period's most popular toys—Superman, Super Mario Bros., Barbie, and Sesame Street. While this was an effective strategy for enticing kids, its zone-themed retail environment found it difficult to efficiently update and refresh together with the changing market.

A store's design needs to change constantly. A design may have a short or longer life span but definitely, it cannot be there forever because it is based on fashion, trends and change. “Theming is a tricky strategy especially for a mass merchandising toy

store like Toy Kingdom,” points out Diego Garay, AIA, president of New York retail design group Point Design, Inc. “While the fantasy environments offered an exciting extra-sensory shopping experience for the customers, they also lock the store in a particular look and layout, making it expensive and time-consuming to change, upgrade, and relocate categories and merchandising fixtures to adapt to the changing demands and trends in the market,” he explains.

Point Design sought to transform Toy Kingdom's fantasyland into a more efficient model without losing the store's fun, playful, and adventurous character. “Ultimately, it is a kids' store. While efficiency is a priority in the new design, it is equally important to create a retail space that appeals to



According to Leandro Artigala, Point Design principal, "Toy Kingdom was designed with essentially two independent parts: the colorful and graphic ceilings that continue onto the walls, and the white floor that carries the selling pads." Striped canopies help draw attention to the merchandise categories located at the store's perimeter (Photographed by Lito Lopez)



Kids are drawn to bright, vibrant colors. The design combined these colors with bold but simple graphics to create a playful and visually exciting environment, as seen in the large dotted pattern used to highlight the checkout counter



The application of colors, shapes, and patterns was directed to the perimeter ceilings and walls so they would not clash and interfere with the equally colorful and graphic merchandise on the floor

our young customers, giving them what they want to see and experience from a toy store," adds Allen Felsenthal, Point Design principal and managing director for Asia.

And what else do kids want from a toy store but lots and lots of toys! Toy Kingdom's new 4000-square meter store in Megamall is every kid's toy paradise with a seemingly infinite display of toys. The volume and range of merchandise are further emphasized by employing a simple, clean, and streamlined layout with wide aisles and clearly

defined selling pads, allowing the store to double as a spacious playground for the kids to freely explore while maintaining an organized retail space for task-oriented adults.

A noticeable feature of the more modern Toy Kingdom is the canopy of gradating colors over each category. "Toy Kingdom was designed with essentially two relatively independent parts: the colorful and graphic ceilings that continue onto the walls, and the white floor that carries the selling pads," says Leandro Artigala, Point Design

principal. The application of colors, shapes, and patterns was concentrated on the perimeter ceilings and walls so that they would not intersect and interfere with the equally colorful merchandise on the floor. This allows the retailer to relocate or change the displays without having to worry about clashing with the colors and features above.

On the other hand, the floor area that accommodates the merchandising fixtures was designed with a generally plain, white finish. This makes the floor a

flexible blank canvas that can readily accommodate any type of display. To highlight the different merchandising categories and help orient the shoppers within the store, the design provided focal points with larger-than-life action figures that can change according to what is popular in the market.

Aside from color, lighting also served as an important ingredient in making the store look appealing to kids. The interiors were intended to be bright because children respond positively to bright spaces.

Additionally, the use of cool, bright lighting further enhances the vivid colors of the merchandise, adding more to their face value. But instead of making the entire space bright, darker portions were introduced to add an element of mystery. "Children love surprises. In the well-lit store, the darker sections, like the tunnel leading to the play area, is something unexpected. This feature makes them wonder what's inside the dark space and in the bright room

behind it. This strategy was meant to encourage kids to go around and explore the store to hopefully find more interesting toys to buy," Garay adds.

To complete Toy Kingdom's fun environment, an in-store playground was included in the spatial program. Interestingly, beyond being an activity area for the young customers, the playground also works as an animated window display. Located adjacent to the store's entrance, visible from the façade of the store through a full

glass window, the playground provides a moving image of kids having fun. Naturally, children like playing with other children. Showing a group of kids playing inside the store is a subtle yet effective way of catching other kids' interest and attention.

With so many options to choose from, consumers aren't just forming their purchasing decisions on costs and benefits alone but upon emotional and expressive desires as well. This is why the experiential retailing format works, especially for toy

stores targeted at children who are naturally drawn to fun and exciting experiences. While the experiential aspect is clearly important, the functional side of retailing also needs to be considered. Together with Toy Kingdom's clean, modern transformation, the design was able to preserve the young playful spirit that the store has been known for by intelligently putting together everything that the kids love in a design model that has the ability to adapt, grow and transform. ■



In contrast with the bright store, the darker tunnel that leads to the play area is an unexpected feature which encourages children to move around and explore the store



Because children respond positively to well-lit spaces, cool bright light was used throughout the store. Cool lighting also enhanced the design's vivid color palette



To make the shopping experience even more delightful for kids, an in-store playground was added to the design program. But more than just an activity area, the playground also works as an "animated window display." Showing a moving image of kids playing inside the store is a subtle yet effective way of catching other children's interest and attention



The large dotted patterns, visually pleasing with their varying colors, greet visitors as they enter the store