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And This Little Teacher Went to Market

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And This Little Teacher Went to Market

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Abstract

Have you ever seen an unmotivated child in a supermarket? There is no such thing! From tempting displays of colorful, animated cereal boxes to appealing, eye-level candies at checkout, children (and adults) are bombarded with motivating messages from the friendly market manager. These master merchandisers could teach us something about motivation in the classroom.



"AND THIS LITTLE TEACHER WENT TO MARKET"

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Even in this day and age of "reluctant learners," marketing strategists and advertisers still obviously know the way to a youngster's heart (and billfold!). Considering consumer motivation techniques teachers could use to "sell" the products of the classroom, we should look at the possibilities of creating a kind of supermarket of learning.

Supermarket managers use Produce Spotters, Tie-ins, Holiday or Theme Specials, Sore Thumbs, Tumble-Jumble, and Shelving Rules to entice us to buy what we otherwise might not. The application of each of these techniques could take many forms.

Produce Spotters

These are the bright little signs or stick-on labels that shout "Special!" "Just Reduced," "New," or "You Won't Want to Miss" items. Such tags could be used by teachers to announce new books in the library, upcoming events, or special learning opportunities becoming available.

Tie-Ins

Tie-ins are products placed near others to cause a combination purchase by the consumer. For example, at Thanksgiving one may expect to find cranberry sauce, stuff-

ing mix, etc., near the frozen turkey for the shopper who otherwise might "forget" these crucial items. In the classroom a tie-in might be the placement of picture books about birds placed at a window where a bird feeder is located. Even a "reluctant reader" will be compelled to pick up the book when a strange warbler is sighted!

Holiday or Theme Specials

Breathes there a teacher who doesn't know about developing thematic bulletin boards at Christmas, Valentines, etc.? But supermarkets have taken the idea a step further--create a holiday or theme where one never existed before? Who among us can resist the display of cheeses during National Dairy Week or the thirty-ways-to-eat-a-spud during Idaho Potato Celebration? Teachers can invent thematic weeks to highlight particular classroom products (content, of course!). Use signs, displays, or whatever to promote a new unit or subject. End the special week with a field trip, art activity, party---anything new and unique.

Sore Thumbs

Clever market managers sell us no end of gadgets by placing them near items we use every day. Check out the long-handled jar scrapers placed conveniently near the peanut butter and jelly. Ice cream scoopers hang close over the half gallons. You could hook a browsing student with a pouch of bookmarks next to the shelf of free-reading volumes.

Tumble-Jumble

Everyone loves the grab-bag, bin of old tools, or box of records at a yard sale. Sometimes supermarket managers stimulate this get-a-bargain attitude by placing a pile of goods in a shopping cart and sticking a 30% off sign on the whole mess. Even if you don't like Paraguayan Pimentos, you may find your hand grasping such a treasure! In the classroom, the teaching of rocks and minerals might be stimulated by putting a group of different specimens in a grab-bag and having each child select one for individual identification and study.

Shelving Rules

Supermarkets are organized to direct shoppers' feet and eyes to high-profit goods. (Don't look for fifty pound

bags of flour at the check-out display stand!) The best shelf is the one at eye level and the prime locations are at the beginning and end of each aisle. If the class is studying Abraham Lincoln, put the books about him on the eye level shelves. Attract the eyes of students with bright book covers (generic product packages are so dull!).



These gimmicks and their classroom applications are only part of the study of wooing the student-customer. Most importantly, marketers use atmosphere to meet or create customers' needs. "Ambience" has become a popular word suggesting how an environment may be designed to create a mood or cause a behavior. When was the last time you were in a classroom that had "ambience"? Think about whether your classroom meets basic environmental standards that sense the needs of students or stimulate their interest.

Supermarket managers are keenly aware of the need for an appropriate physical environment for shoppers. They carefully regulate lighting, temperature, and cleanliness to meet the basic physical needs of their clientele. Teachers should make sure that classrooms are clean, well-lighted places for all, and they should take care to accommodate the needs of children with poor eyesight, hearing, or other physical problems. Needs for security are likewise met by establishing orderliness in the environment.

Store personnel are encouraged to know and recognize regular customers by name; this promotes identification with the store and meets customers' needs for belonging. Teachers can recognize children similarly, by announcing birthdays, giving them personal spaces in the classroom, and otherwise acknowledging them as individuals.

This idea is extended in supermarkets to the point of making customers feel esteemed. Courtesy, deference, and personalized services make customers feel like important people (the secret of all sales!). Classroom praise works toward the same effect, whether through a pat on the back, posting of successful work, or just a smile.

Whatever the technique used to attract students to learning, teachers today must realize, as have the master merchandizers of consumer good, that you have to "sell" a product, whether it's a new kind of spaghetti sauce or knowledge about the culture of Italy. Such selling almost always involves wooing the customer by making him or her more physically comfortable and secure, feeling more a member of the group, and being recognized as an important person.