To 'Supersize' or Not

At the end of the 20th century, the term "supersize" became part of our vocabulary. It was created by the fast-food industry in the ongoing "burger wars" that had begun when fast-food companies looked to lift flat revenues without having to address the industry's deeper problem.

Supersizing crossed into other areas of life, so much so that it became the topic of a movie. In 2004 Morgan Spurlock produced, directed and starred in the documentary film "Super Size Me." The movie depicted the over-consuming society we have become, underscored by experiences Spurlock gleaned while traveling the country.

Well, the "bigger is always better" thing has now ventured far beyond fast food; it is part of our supercharged life. We have supersized big-box stores, supermarkets and movie theater concession stands. Our houses are larger; pleasure boats are no longer bass boats but are off-shore racing boats (in local lakes). Why go out and buy a Ford F150 pick-up to commute to work when you can buy a Ford F350 Cummins Diesel Extended Cab to make that same 30-minute drive?

Going Local

Whoa. Let's slow down and rethink where we are headed, then apply those thoughts to our industry. Just like so many other areas of retail and life, our facilities are getting bigger. There can be many reasons for such a level of growth in physical size; however, the reasons cannot be applied to every new market and/or trade area.

One universal principle must still apply when creating any appropriate market development plan: It is the market that determines what is to be created to serve it. We do not build it thinking the market will come; the market must remain the architect and creator.

The retail industry is reversing itself in many ways. Opportunities still abound for larger-format stores and offerings, but newer, smaller formats are also being developed by the larger national and regional retailers so that their brands can enter markets previously determined to be restricted to entry. Likewise, specialty formats are being created to allow access to those customer segments that previously have avoided "big."

Localization remains paramount in helping to determine what should be developed for each market. It is for this reason that the "cookie-cutter" philosophy that had long been force-fed to the consumer has finally been rebuffed. Forcing island marketers (gas bars) into each market is the same as forcing buildings of 4,100 square feet, 16 fueling positions and double car-wash facilities. Retail has come to realize that multiple formats and concepts must be developed for and targeted at specific customers, trade areas and markets.

Specialty Delivery

As all segments of the retail food industry become more clouded, it is critical that each individual retail company also adjusts its store sets and size to different demographics. We have, for instance, retail clients who have developed and built facilities that range from 1,600 to 8,400 square feet. Some include extremely diverse profit centers and others simply have a pedestrian-traffic-only store format.

There are certainly markets that require large locations. At the same time, retailers must recognize that society is reversing itself and, in many cases, preferring "specialty" over expansive, one-stop shopping. The best example of this is the now "dinosaurisk" position of regional malls; their market position has been relegated to the new phenomena of the "lifestyle center" (a topic for another column).

Give the customer *her store* and it will become part of her life. Provide what she requires and she will respond by including her store in her everyday life pattern. ■

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