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Throw Out the Broad Brush

“**T**he Circle of Life” is a notable song from the award-winning movie “The Lion King.” The chorus (written by Elton John) is:

“In the circle of life
“It’s the wheel of fortune
“It’s the leap of faith
“It’s the band of hope
“Til we find our place
“On the path unwinding
“In the circle, in the circle of life.”

Those words depict the metaphor that often represents how we perform on a daily basis in the unwieldy world of retail. The song continues with a stanza that says how some fall by the wayside and others soar to the stars; don’t we each witness this fact on an almost daily basis in our business lives? This one retail fact is exhibited by each of the facilities we operate in support of our routine, frequent customers and those we hope to make regular customers.

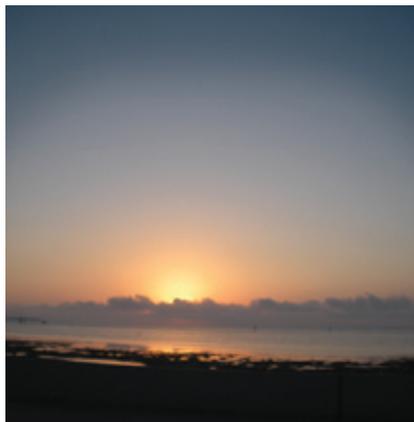
If we are active, participatory members of the retail community, one of our ongoing goals is to “convert” potential customers into habitual customers. A correctly conceived development strategy combined with implementation of a properly created operational initiative allows us to become part of our customers’ daily lives and to move into the realm of being a deep-seated part of their behavior.

The composer continues, “Some of us fall by the wayside and some of us soar to the stars. Some of us sail through our troubles and some have to live with the scars.” Does that not really convey the basic core of what our daily business life is all about in this ever-changing retail world?

A Narrow Brush

After many years of international, national and expanded regional companies trying to cover all customer needs and requirements of their daily lifestyles with that “broad brush” application, some have recognized that such a mundane retail mindset does not work and, in fact, has never worked. It is very simple: The “one strategy fits all markets” idea is wrong.

It is nearly impossible for broad-based companies to create and imple-



ment a local asset marketing plan that can identify, analyze, respond and meet customer needs, wants and requirements on a store-by-store basis. It seems that with the methodology applied by today’s large companies, it is nearly impossible to develop a trade-area-specific retail strategy that might simply relate to one, two or a handful of stores. We most certainly read about the “local realization of market application”; in other words, “blah, blah, blah.”

However, reality is very easy to recognize when one visits various retail facilities in extremely diverse markets and

witnesses the universal misapplication of a poorly conceived market strategy, routinely misaimed at the very trade area it is supposed to be serving. Why is it that we constantly witness the selling or consolidation of assets? It is because the companies that have never been able to respond on a specific trade-area basis cannot inherently develop the ability to do so. That “broad brush” is so very easy to stroke, whereas it really takes creative marketing skills to identify, recognize and meet the individual needs of a specific trade area such as Sacramento as opposed to one in Sedalia.

The problem in this industry is an overwhelming need to freely apply that “brush” to diverse markets. Hence, the result has been the creation of an environment of acquiring assets created by “non-reality” corporations. If we accomplish the due diligence required with each market move, we can properly respond to conditions that were always there, yet not freely recognized by the developing companies.

As the song says, “There is more to be seen than can ever be seen. More to do than can ever be done.” Go out and learn what must be understood to properly and expectedly meet the demands of your customers. Success will follow one location at a time. Some might say it is a slow process. But in truth, the process is the only thing that matters in terms of proving ourselves to be servants and to matter in the eyes of our customers. When it comes to reality checks, what else matters?

One truth remains constant: The concept never changes, but the marketplace always does. ■