



## **BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES PODCAST #120**

Hello and thank you for joining us today. This is the Brand Secrets and Strategies Podcast #120

Welcome to the Brand Secrets and Strategies podcast where the focus is on empowering brands and raising the bar.

I'm your host Dan Lohman. This weekly show is dedicated to getting your brand on the shelf and keeping it there.

Get ready to learn actionable insights and strategic solutions to grow your brand and save you valuable time and money.

**LETS ROLL UP OUR SLEEVES AND GET STARTED!**

Welcome. How do you convert occasional customers into loyal shoppers? This is a question I get asked a lot. What's interesting about this question is that most of the people who ask me this think about how it relates to an in-store demo or a marketing program, or some sort of shopper loyalty program. My answer is always the same. Real shopper loyalty is earned. It's not something that's embossed on a plastic card.

I have a loyalty card for every airline I fly on. Back in the '90s when I was traveling so much, I actually was in the top club or top level of every



single air mileage program that I joined. I also have a loyalty card for every retailer that I shop at. My point is this, customers use loyalty cards as a coupon. It's not truly a loyalty card. What it is, is a way to get the best price on the items that are promoted within that retailer.

Real loyalty converts casual customers into brand ambassadors. This is what every brand wants. And remember, I keep talking emphasizing why this is so very important, and why you need to pay attention to this. The value of the shopper that you drive into a retail store is far more valuable to the retailer than the product inside your package. This is your single greatest point of leverage when negotiating with a retailer to avoid slotting and other menu fees.

Retailers generically don't make anything. They sell other people's stuff. And what they sell is the real estate that your product takes up on their shelf. What they want is more traffic in their store and a reasonable profit. This is where you come in, and this is why this is so critically important. If you can help the retailer attract that unique shopper, they enter the store and buy your product. This is how that retailer competes more effectively against their market.

The sole focus of every merchandising strategy should be to make it easier for shoppers to find your products. Sounds simple, right? But it's not that easy. This is the same goal for every brand and every item in the retail store. You're competing for the attention of every shopper, along with every other brand. Most merchandising strategies focus narrowly on the individual item sales and overlook how your product



interacts with other items in the store. In most cases, your sales have an impact on the sales of other items, making your product more valuable to the retailer when they consider the shopper's total purchase at checkout.

Effective merchandising helps to maximize each and every selling opportunity. It helps make it easier for the shoppers to purchase your product and find them across every store and every category. These strategies can act as a line of breadcrumbs, making it easy for the customer to buy your products.

Consider how the shopper journey has changed. How does a new customer find your product? How can you ensure that they choose your product over your competition? Brands need to adopt a merchandising checklist to grow sales and loyalty. This is how you convert occasional customers into loyal shoppers.

Before I go any further, I want to remind you that this show is about you and it's for you. Also, there's a free downloadable guide for you at the end of almost every episode of my podcast. I always try to include one easy-to-download quick-to-digest strategy that you can instantly adopt and make your own, one that you can use to grow sustainable sales and compete more

effectively. Remember, the goal here is to get your product on more retailers' shelves and into the hands of more shoppers. If you like the podcast, please share it with your friends, subscribe, and leave a review.



In podcast episode 104, the Essential New Item Checklist: The Recipe for Success, I share a story, a true story that someone shared with me. They were trying to help a friend that had just launched their product, and they just gained distribution in a local store. She went into the store and wasn't able to find the product. While with the help of the store personnel, she was able to find their product after about 20 minutes of looking. They found out that the product was merchandised in the wrong place. The challenge was because the product was merchandised in the wrong place, all the promotional efforts that the brand was making to try to drive traffic into the store to try the new product was a waste.

In addition to that, the retailer wasn't able to benefit from the brand's hard work. On top of that, to be able to fix this problem and have the product remerchandised on the shelf where it belonged, it's going to be expensive, and it's most likely not something that's going to happen overnight. You've got to make another appointment, and then you've got to recommend which items need to be discontinued.

Next, where does your product go on the shelf, and why does it deserve to be there? These are just a couple of the things that you need to think about. This is the focus of today's podcast. The moral of the story is this: It's problems like this that can derail or even bankrupt a brand when they're first starting out. It's problems like this that can waste a tremendous amount of money. It can cause you to go through any of the available funds you have almost overnight. And more importantly, this is something that should never have happened. This is something that



could easily have been prevented if the brand followed the strategies that I talk about on this podcast and my mini-courses.

Remember that your brand has your name on it. From the shopper's perspective, anything that happens with your brand is a reflection of your commitment to make it easy for your customers to find your products wherever they shop. This is why product placement, distribution issues, out of stock issues, et cetera, are so critically important to the success of your brand.

It can also negatively impact your relationship with the retailer. No brand wants to embarrass the retailer without out of stocks or any other issues. Therefore, the goal of every brand needs to be making sure that you put your best foot forward every single step. Remember, you never get a second chance to disappoint a customer. You got to make sure that that customer can find your product, that it looks right, that it's priced right, et cetera, every single time they go looking for it.

The real strength of your brand is its ability to convert occasional customers into brand ambassadors. Shoppers can't buy your product if they can't find them. This is one of the most overlooked and aspects of every brand success. This is something that you should not blindly trust anyone else, period.

Most brands are so excited to get their products onto a store shelf they overlook the importance of a solid merchandising strategy. You've worked hard to create a product that people want. Now you need to make it easy



for them to buy the product. The sole focus of every merchandising strategy should be making it easier for shoppers to find it.

The first impression most customers have of your product is when they first see it on a traditional retailer store. Let's face it, retailers pay to play. It's expensive to sell your products in traditional retail. Having both a digital and traditional retail strategy

is important, and it's the best way to build sustainable sales. It's critically important that your product stand out on a crowded shelf. Effective merchandising helps to maximize each and every selling opportunity. It makes it easier for shoppers to purchase your products and to find them across every store wherever they shop.

Knowing how to maximize these strategies can help exponentially grow your brand while converting occasional customers into loyal evangelists. Knowing the strategies can maximize your promotional effectiveness, can help you grow sustainable sales, and even make it easier for customers to find your product. Knowing these strategies can give you a significant and sustainable competitive advantage and traditional retail and online.

If you've been listening to my podcasts and consuming any of my content, you know that I'm a firm believer that you need to take ownership for your brand. It's my belief that you need help guide whoever's helping to merchandise your products or getting distribution, including agencies, brokers, et cetera, to put your products where customers can easily find it. You need to own this. Do not take this for granted. Develop a solid merchandising strategy and then hold everyone



who touches it accountable. Everyone. This is exactly why I created my mini-course, *How to Land Shelf Space and Win at Retail: Proven Strategies to Grow Sales, Stand Out on a Crowd Shelf, and to Extra Loyal Shoppers*.

I learned early in my career about the importance of having distribution in every store and then following that up with a solid merchandising strategy. The two go hand in hand. In other words, you need both to be successful. The current strategy is, at least what you're told, is that you show up to a retail buyer's appointment, you pitch your brand, and you hope and pray that they're going to put your brand on the shelf someplace where customers can easily find it.

Remember the story I shared a little bit ago about the product that was mis-merchandised? Retailers need your help. Savvy retailers want and need brands that are willing to step up and help guide them to help merchandise your products to grow sustainable category sales. This is why the current strategy is in enough. In the mini course *How to Land Shelf Space and Win at Retail*, I share several creative and innovative strategies that don't cost much, including some that are free, that you can use to help illustrate where your brand belongs on a retailer's shelf.

We've all heard the expression that a picture's worth a thousand words. Well, why not present to the retailer a picture of where your product goes on the shelf? Don't assume anything. Don't assume that they know who your customer is and how your customer shops a category. Help guide them to make the best decision to grow sales by leveraging your brand.



When making recommendations to the retailer, you need to be able to present the retailer with a fact-based strategy or story as to why your product belongs where you're recommending it go. I talk more about that on other podcast episodes and on other mini-courses. One of the key points here is that you've got to make sure that your product is merchandised in this same place consistently at every single one of the retailer's stores.

In developing a fact-based strategy, you need to be able to share insights, actionable insights, about what your customer and how your customer buys the product. Now, I know that the traditional way of thinking is that you supply the retailer with a topline canned report. The simple reality is that every brand that you're competing with is sharing the exact same canned topline report with the retailer only with your unique spin. Retailers want insights, actionable insights.

Retailers want to know about your customer, who your customer is, and how they shop a category when they buy your product. This is why I developed my free Turnkey Sales Story Strategies course to help you identify who your core customer is.

And when they buy your product, how do they use the product? Once you gain these important insights, the course teaches you how to bake those into your selling story so that your message is communicated clearly across your entire sales funnel. Don't just pay lip service to this. Even the big brands mess this up. This is their Achilles heel, and this is how I was able to push some of the largest, most iconic brands on the



planet around for years. And this is the strategy that I use with my clients.

Have you ever played the game where you tell someone a story, and then they tell someone else, and so on? By the time the story comes back around to you, it's unrecognizable. The premise of this free course is to teach you how to tell your selling story with the same enthusiasm, passion, and authenticity as the founder. In addition to that, it teaches you how to tell your story with this same evangelistic passion and enthusiasm as your most loyal customers. These are the kinds of insights that every retailer needs. This is what retailers really want. These are the kinds of insights that are going to help you stand out in a crowded category. These are the insights that are going to help differentiate you from your competition while giving you a sustainable and substantial competitive advantage in your category.

Now, before you make your presentation to the retailer, you've got to know who your retailer is. This is also something that I cover in that free mini course. The mistake that most brands make is they assume that all retailers are alike, but they're not. We were taught early in my career that what you did is you simply created one template, one PowerPoint or keynote template, and you simply change the retailer's logo to customize the presentation to make it unique for that retailer.

Now, be honest with yourself if you're listening to this, how many of you have used exact same presentation at multiple retailers? Every brand that I've mentored shows me their presentations, and they're the same



thing. My point is this, customers want you to personalize your offering to fit their needs. They want you to communicate with them as though they're humans and not some random focus group like the big brands use.

If you're able to personalize your presentation to each retailer, that's how you let them know that they're important to you. That's how you communicate your commitment to differentiating your offer with them. That's how you demonstrate to the retailer that you value and appreciate them and that you're going to work or go out of your way to work to help them grow sustainable sales by leveraging the strength of your brand.

The brands with the most success here are the brands that become experts in their retail partners. They understand what the retailer expects from your specific category. Do they want to use it to drive traffic in their store?

Do they want to use it to help compete against other retailers in the market? What are the requirements for the retailer when merchandising a product? How many days of supply do you need to have? How does the product get from the back room and onto the shelf? The more you know about your retail partner and the easier that you can make it for them to get your product on the shelf where it belongs, the easier it's going to be for them to be able to say yes to every item that you introduce to him.

One of the things that you can do to help the retailer is to be able to help the retailer understand how the consumer shops. In other words, how do they make decisions when they come into your category? A lot of people



call this the consumer decision tree. Now, this is something that you can spend a lot of money on to have a third-party solution provider validate when in reality it's as simple as asking your customers, actually talking to your customers and asking them, "What decisions do you make when you choose our product?"

Another way to do this is with an online survey or use another survey strategy. So, let me give you an example of from when I used to work with the diaper category. A consumer, a new mom typically, would walk into the diaper category and then identify what quality of diaper they wanted. Did they want a premium product that they knew provided excellent value for the price or did they want an economy product? Was price the key driver when they came into the category?

Next, what size diaper did they want? Now, when I was doing this, we had gender-specific diapers. They don't anymore. The next question that the consumer would have to think about is what size bag did they want. Did they want a package that would last a couple of days or did they want a month's supply of diapers? Just kidding. Kids go through diapers really quick.

My point is this: When your customers walk into the category, what are the first, second, third, et cetera decisions that they make in the order they make them? Talk to several customers and try to understand, try to learn as much about their strategy, what's important to them as they come into the category.



Let me give you another analogy to help illustrate why this matters so much. Have you ever made a cake? If you add the ingredients in the wrong sequence and the wrong order, then your cake's not going to come out right. While you're talking to your customers, asks them how they use the product. You might learn things about your product that you didn't know before. Again, this is part of that free mini-course, Turnkey Sale Stories Strategies, something that every brand should take. The best part about this is the more you get to know your customers, the more you get to relate to your customers and the more effective you are at communicating with them in their language, the easier it is for you to build a loyal community around your brand.

Another strategy that I want to recommend that I talk about on a lot of podcasts, although I'm not going to dig deep into it on this episode, is that you need to have a loyal brand strategy outside of traditional retail. What I mean by this is if I go into the store and I buy your product, you don't know who I am. You don't know how I use the product when I take it home or who I share it with. However, if you can develop a loyal community around your brand outside of traditional retail, then that's the best way to add rocket fuel to your brand.

So, why is this important? Because if you're able to do this effectively, it can help you maximize every promotional opportunity. You can become a category leader. A category leader's any brand willing able to step up and help their retail partners drive sales by leveraging the strength of your brand. It can mean higher sales and profits. It can maximize your trade spending ROI. It can help you convert occasional shoppers into loyal



evangelists, and it can open up new doors and new opportunities for you to promote your products at the retailer in addition to getting new products on their shelf, et cetera.

In order for this to work, you need to have consistent brand messaging. This is where your sales story matters. You need to make sure that all this is baked into your selling story and that that story is told consistently at every part of your sales funnel by everyone who touches your brand. This is why I launched my Merchandising Checklist to Grow Sales and Loyalty. Real shopper loyalty's earned, not found on a plastic card. Real loyalty converts occasional customers into loyal brand evangelists.

In this mini-course, you're going to learn how to assess current merchandising strategies, why they work, and why they don't; identify a better way to address sustainable shopper engagement through proper merchandising; develop strategies to make merchandising easier for retailers; become a value-added resource to your retail partners; how to become a category leader; differentiate category merchandising to help the retailer drive sales and compete more effectively in their market; identify

what retailers really want and need to know; implement merchandising strategies your competition doesn't have; be creative in building shopper excitement with merchandising; get the most from your merchandisers; identify why proper product placement is the keys to sales success; how do use strategies to avoid out of stocks and disappointing customers. You



can get there by going to [brandsecretsandstrategies.com/merchandisingchecklist](https://brandsecretsandstrategies.com/merchandisingchecklist).

I want to thank you for listening. Today's free downloadable guide is the Essential New Item Checklist: The Recipe for Success. These are the foundational things that every brand must do every time they present a new item, every time that they attend a category review, every time that they meet with or work with a retailer, including every agency, broker, or distributor. You can get the Essential New Item Checklist on the podcast show notes or on the podcast webpage. You can get there by going to [brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session120](https://brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session120). Thank you for listening, and I look forward to seeing you in the next episode.

### **This episode's FREE downloadable guide**

New product innovation is the lifeblood of every brand. New products fuel sustainable growth, attracts new shoppers, and increases brand awareness. Know the critical steps to get your product on more retailer's shelves and into the hands of more shoppers.

CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE STRATEGIC GUIDE: [The Essential New Item Checklist - The Recipe For Success](https://brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session120)

Thanks again for joining us today. Make sure to stop over at [brandsecretsandstrategies.com](https://brandsecretsandstrategies.com) for the show notes along with more great brand building articles and resources. Check out my free course Turnkey Sales Story Strategies, your roadmap to success. You can find that on my



website or at [TurnkeySalesStoryStrategies.com/growsales](https://www.turnkeysalesstorystrategies.com/growsales). Please subscribe to the podcast, leave a review, and recommend it to your friends and colleagues.

Sign up today on my website so you don't miss out on actionable insights and strategic solutions to grow your brand and save you valuable time and money.

I appreciate all the positive feedback. Keep your suggestions coming.

Until next time, this is Dan Lohman with Brand Secrets and Strategies where the focus is on empowering brands and raising the bar.