

On making the customers REALLY want it!

A few days ago I was wandering down Oxford Street when my eye was caught by a window display in the Marks & Spencer store. This display was so understated with a few plinths highlighting a micro-system; a LCD television; a DAB radio and a few more items together with space; a whole lot of empty space. The end result radiated quality and exclusivity. There was a complete absence of "Sale" and "30% Off" stickers; just a few discrete "Hi-Fi Systems from £79" cards. As a punter I would certainly have been drawn in to see more.



Let's be honest. With a few honourable exceptions most AV stores have been rather poor in the windows dressing stakes and it has ever been thus since the first dealers bemoaned the expense of a few sheets of crepe paper to add a dash of colour. I recall that a decade ago my good lady wife tried to put together a co-operative effort where a number of dealers shared the cost of a full-time window dresser and the necessary props so that each store could have fresh professional displays every month. And did it get off the ground? Well of course not. But I digress because what struck me most of all was the way that M&S had used the

customers in much the same way. I refer to the long forgotten Imhofs music store which had a huge floor given over to high fidelity yet contained only a dozen or so alternative sound systems mounted in a long oak display cabinet; in what was the upmarket style of the day, and all wired through a comprehensive comparator. I remember asking about a Quad system and discovering that they preferred never to soil their turntables with anything so sordid as a rock music album. And when I persevered I was rewarded with the response that if I paid in full today then my name would go forward to the waiting list and they would contact me in due course. There may even have been some comment about removing my boots before ever entering their store again. They got away with this for years and seemed to prosper although at some stage they did relent and start to stock rock music records and do it very well indeed; becoming one of those few places where you could find the most obscure Bo Diddley or Little Walter pressings.

I mention all this because it has long been a mystery to me and most other practitioners in this industry as to why our products; our very best and very expensive products just don't rate the kudos awarded to no end of fashionable tat which sits comfortably alongside the Bentleys and Cartiers of the world. Theories abound as to why this is so and theories they will remain because it is unlikely that the situation will now ever change. But chucking in my 'twopenneth' it is my recollection that on the rare occasions I have visited Bentley and Bristol showrooms, and the even rarer occasions when I have visited Christian Dior and Van Cleef & Arpels, I have been treated with a distant courtesy and subconsciously made to feel slightly privileged to get close to the "pieces". Unless you move in polo playing circles you feel a need to prove you can afford to be there and in doing so the balance of power has subtly shifted. Contrast this scene with that in another showroom where you know; you just know, the salesperson is desperate for the sale. Maybe we can smell the fear.

But then we all know that if you can't have it, you crave it and if you finally get it, you love it and so do all your friends. Maybe old Mr. Imhof had it right all along. ■

“There may have been some comment about removing my boots before ever entering their store again”

visualisations of an upmarket fashion store. It was a few years ago as an innocent abroad that I wandered into the Prada store in New Bond Street; a store, which to judge from the sparse displays, only sold six or seven products. Eventually one of the black clad size zero svelte young things deigned to talk to me and I proceeded to buy my daughter's Christmas present. Only when I left the store with a tiny black bag and considerably less money in the bank, did I realise that at no stage had I enquired of the price.

Ever since I've wished I could sell products in that way. What you might term the "I'm sorry Sir but we only have two pairs in the store so ask nicely and I might agree to sell you a pair" approach to selling. But then as I continued my rare saunter down New Oxford Street I recalled a long forgotten hi-fi emporium that treated its