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Israelis marked Rosh Hashana on Friday, shaken by the inconclusive war



## Retail experts share their secrets

By Robert Gold  
THE NEWS-TIMES

bucks instead of five. What happened?  
There's some marketing magic

You're heading into the supermarket, determined to get some milk and eggs, and that's it.

But what's that blinking box? You check it out -- it's showing off a new caramel coffee. You snatch some up. There's a roasted turkey sign. Hmm, that sounds good, so you buy a 10-pound turkey. And, of course, you buy those eggs and milk.

A few other things grab your attention, then you head for the cash register. The lady's cart in front of you is filled, so you have some time. You're tucked between rows and rows of candy and gum. Well, you are hungry so you grab an energy bar and some mints.

You're heading back to the car when it hits you. You just spent 50 bucks instead of five. What happened?

There's some marketing magic behind the scenes.

Display designers and marketers spend their careers finding ways to entice shoppers to buy what they weren't thinking about. How does it happen? A few local experts explain.

### Front of store/near cash register

The front of the store is the holy grail of spaces within a retail store. Hardware store. Supermarket. Music shop. It doesn't matter. People can't help but grab an extra thing or two.

"It's kind of a wild place because it's so productive," said David Fields, the managing director of Ridgefield-based Ascendant Consulting, which advises retailers on how to boost sales. "No matter what you put up there, it will sell more. Short of putting a washing machine up there, it will sell more (than in



other spots of a store)."

Fields said products near the register bring in about eight times more in sales per square foot than the rest of the store. And product makers will often pony up close to that increase to get their items in the prime spot.

### **Why do customers buy things there?**

"It's impulse buying, things that people may forget," said Kevin Hopper, a retail marketing expert at Westport-based Catapult Integrated Services.

Plus, a smart retailer will place items that customers use a lot but might not think about when shopping.

Fields said retailers often sell lower-priced items near the front. After spending a couple hundred bucks on groceries, it won't feel too bad to buy an 89-cent candy bar.

Customers often buy things near the register because they don't want to come back again. Sure, they could price check those batteries at another store. But they are already in line and there is a four-pack of AA batteries waiting to be purchased.

"It has to be low involvement because they want to get out of there quickly. (They think) 'How can I prolong the time until my next visit there?'" said Fields.

Fields said that despite the success of most products placed up front, there are two clear winners in his 20 years of marketing experience: candy and magazines.

"Candy manufacturers spend a fortune to be at the front there," he said.

The single items bring in profits, can be sold quickly, and aren't a huge investment for shoppers.

### **Can anyone mess up selling things near the front of the store?**

Sure, they can.

Often, a customer is lured by a brand. There might be racks of candy bars, but they want Hershey's.

The key is to make sure nothing blocks the brand name, said Hopper. "If you are not seeing the brand you enjoy, you're not going to stop.

It's not going to trigger your eye to stop. It's all about the brand being the hero," Hopper said.

That means showing off soda cans so the front label is visible. That means keeping display boxes neat and clean.

And it means not making displays too difficult for the store's workers.

"The stock person is going to take the time to set it up because they know it's not going to be difficult," Hopper said.

Brandon Ince, the operations manager at Crew Design in Kent, said keeping cashiers happy can't be overlooked.

Crew Design creates displays for retailers. At times, those include recordings.

But that can be too much within the cramped area, where cashiers are already dealing with a line of customers.

"The checkout is pretty limited (for sounds) because you want to be able to keep the workers," Ince said.

Fields said too much clutter up front can turn off customers as well.

"They are not going to put up a six-foot high gondola at checkout. It blocks people's views," he said.

### **Rest of store**

This is where designers can let their creative juices flow. With shoppers barraged by plenty of goodies, product makers need a hook. For Crew Design, that meant creating a "Super Robot Monkey" cardboard creature for Hasbro. Complete with flashing lights and the toy's theme song, the display helped grab attention for the actual product.

Another time, the Kent company created a three-dimensional cardboard cake with flickering candles to celebrate Play-Doh's 50th year.

"If they're not really paying attention, a motion sensor will activate the lights," Ince said.

Ince said audio and visual attractions are becoming more popular nationwide in displays.

"It's an evolution that has been going on forever," Ince said.

"Electronics have gotten smaller, gotten less expensive."

Hopper said although a display can be different, it has to connect somehow with readers.

A few years back, to help push different snacks, Hopper helped design a cardboard backpack as part of a back-to-school promotion. Placed among the display were items like chocolate-colored markers and rulers showing the company's name.

"You need to create a very, very powerful call to action," Hopper said. "Once you reel them in, then you can talk about the benefits of the products."

Regardless of where a display is located, there are limits. Because in the end, shoppers visit a store to buy things. They don't want too many distractions.

"You can't create a display that's so complicated consumers won't interact with it," Ince said.

Still, the marketers have a powerful job in the world of advertising, Ince said.

"We only have the consumers' attention for five seconds," Ince said.

"But it's probably the most important five seconds because they can actually purchase the products."