

**SAVVY RETAILERS SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT
SHOPPING CARTS ARE PART OF THEIR BRAND IMAGE**

By Jimco Maintenance Inc.

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HOW SHOPPING CARTS CAN HELP SUPPORT YOUR BRAND IMAGE

Rethinking the Shopping Cart

The question isn't what you must do for your shopping carts, but what your shopping carts, as important selling tools, should do for you.

As most people in the industry know, good lighting and color schemes have been cornerstones of modern retailing for many years. They can make the difference between a gloomy atmosphere and one that seems to burst with shiny new possibilities. In short, they are necessary factors in creating a positive buying experience.

While these stalwarts of mass merchandising may not take on the same degree of urgency as some types of store infrastructure, such as lighting, signage, or air conditioning, they should not be overlooked. For a number of reasons, shopping carts possess an inherent ability to increase or erode the value of your brand.

First of all, shopping carts are a key component of any large-volume retail store. Without them, customers can only purchase what they're able to carry in their hands. To grasp the critical nature of this fact, one need only imagine what a Wal-Mart store manager might say if all of their shopping carts were to suddenly stop rolling on, say, Christmas Eve.

Add Value to a Customer's Shopping Experience

Beyond their practical value as equipment, shopping carts must also look good. This is where brand relevance comes into play. What's at issue is whether the customer who shops at your stores thinks it's important that the equipment you put in their hands is aesthetically pleasing. This has a direct bearing on the type of experience you're attempting to create.

The shopping cart is, after all, something that customers spend quite a bit of time using while in the store making purchase decisions. For shoppers making larger purchases, much more time is spent interacting with this humble piece of equipment than any other in the store.

Viewed in this context, the question moves from whether the shopping cart is merely capable of containing product to how it's affecting each customer's mood and overall shopping experience.

It's one thing to have bright lights and nice colors, yet it's quite another to give a customer a cart that is visibly dirty. Throw in a little rust and a wobbly wheel and it's pretty easy to see that there is a big discrepancy between the perception created by the interior aspects of a well-planned store and the one generated by the shopping cart that's actually in the customer's hands (and into which they supposedly want to place their new purchases).

In today's germophobic world, dirt also produces a variety of connotations. Images of germs, as well as filth in general, readily come to mind. A lot of this has been magnified by recent media reports about dirty shopping carts.

In February, 2007, ABC News released a piece entitled, "Shopping Cart Handles Have More Germs Than Public Restrooms", in which Representative Fred Allen (D-Ark), was quoted saying to Good Morning America,

"When I was campaigning, many of my constituents brought it to my attention [that] many shopping carts could possibly have contamination on them."

Like the Inside Edition report, "Shopping Cart Investigation", which preceded it, the ABC story described bacteria covering shopping carts and consequently made a big stir when it was released. Several laws around the country (notably in San Francisco and the State of Arkansas) have since been passed mandating shopping cart cleaning.

KOKO Channel 5 in Oklahoma City also added fuel to the fire when their shopping cart investigation revealed that a number of popular retailers' carts exposed customers to bacteria levels 1,000 times greater than what they would normally encounter during the day.

While these reports are rather sensational, it should be noted that despite the unsanitary aspect of shopping carts at some stores, there have been no reported instances of people getting sick from shopping carts so far.

But this misses the point. In addition to focusing on lighting and color schemes, today's modern retailer can add significant value to a customer's in-store experience simply by maintaining their shopping carts. Unfortunately, this is a detail that is often overlooked by store management—both at the corporate and store levels.

It's not, however, something that is overlooked by consumers, "Every kid in America teeths on shopping cart handles," said Dr. Chuck Gerba at the University of Arizona (see ABC article above). "They don't have the best sanitary habits... . I mean, you're putting your broccoli where their butt was."

Beyond Appearance: Shaping Customers' Moods with Properly Maintained Equipment

In addition to fears about contamination, consumers also notice it when shopping carts don't function well. The web site Pet Peeves (www.mypetpeeves.com) has researched and assembled thousands of respondents' common annoyances.

The cart category contains 149 entries. Next to the complaint about stray carts in store aisles and parking lots, the single biggest complaint involved shopping cart wheels that do not roll well. Dirty and sticky carts were also chief complaints.

By not properly maintaining their shopping carts, many retail stores miss an opportunity to increase their customers' satisfaction and may even negatively impact the value of their brand image.

But there's simply no reason to do this. For a relatively small cost, Jimco Maintenance offers a comprehensive service program that will manage the appearance and functionality of an operator's entire fleet of shopping carts.

As described in the article, "Shopping Cart Preventative Maintenance; Important Things to Consider," Jimco can help today's retailer periodically clean, disinfect, and repair and repair their carts on a regular basis.

Next time a customer enters your store, don't shake hands with an ugly shopping cart. Greet them with a Jimco quality-assured selling machine.

To receive more information about Jimco and its services, please call Paul Moseley at 800-392-8678.