

Surprise & Delight

By Abby Kleckler

Tell a story. Every retailer has its own story: its own history, its own merchandise, its own staff. It's not news to you that telling your story is what sets you apart from the competition, but the challenge is keeping your message fresh and relevant.

Story, a New York City gift shop, has told 26 distinct stories since 2011, all under one roof. It changes its theme every four to eight weeks, shutting down for 10 days in between to make the magic happen.

"As our founder says, 'We have the point of view of a magazine, we change like a gallery, and we sell things like a store,'" says Jenny Shechtman, Story's director of operations. "We pick an editorial direction and we go from there."

A complete reinvention of a space is likely unrealistic, but Story's inventive ideas can spice up anything from a small corner of a shop to a whole department.

All About the Customer

Many customers come back for every experience, knowing there will be something new that they didn't see on a previous visit.

"We describe our regular customers as those who have a yearly subscription to a magazine because they're interested in the magazine and they like the editorial voice of the magazine," Shechtman says. "It's always relevant and current for them and to them."

The retail concept also brings in customers who are interested in a particular story: "Well Being," "Made in America" and "Art," to name a few.

"These are like the people who will buy a magazine off the shelf of the store because they're interested in whoever is on the cover,"

Shechtman says.

Some stories come up more than once such as "Home for the Holidays," although the design resemblance yearafteryear is minimal.

"Style.Tech" was fitting during Fashion Week, "Color" made sense in the spring and "Love" is appropriately positioned around Valentine's Day.

The store aims to be naturally approachable with a wide variety of unique, neverbeforeseen-products, many of which are from small designers and are on consignment.

"There's definitely always something for everyone: men, women and children from the ages of 2 to 92," Shechtman says. "There's something in the store for \$1, up to a \$15,000 Rolex watch."

A Storied Experience

For a business focused on variation, consistency of experience is important. One of the largest components of this is Story's enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff of 24 employees.

"We dedicate two to three days in between each story to product training," Shechtman says.

"We'll have vendors come in and train our staff, and we'll also have the staff be assigned certain brands to train one another."

The team at Story has made a strategic decision not to make any design appear temporary.



"When it comes to store build out, we don't want to in any way make it feel like it's not permanent," Shechtman says, "We keep that in mind whenever we're choosing or designing our fixtures."

Customers can also count on Story as an event hub. The store has hosted more than 350 events that range from pasta making to standup comedy to makeyourown ornament, and even an interview with designer Donna Karan.

Story has built a business around keeping things fresh and relevant, always different from the competition and always piquing a customer's interest.

"Two words are always part of our rhetoric here," Shechtman says, "Surprise and delight." **LGR**

