The Secret Behind Retail Customer Experience Success Is Brain Science

[This is a guest article by Denise Lee Yohn.]

What happens when a retailer applies a neuroscience approach to design its customer experience? PIRCH.

PIRCH is a retailer of high-end appliances and home fixtures with eight showrooms across the U.S. CNBC, The Washington Post, and Bloomberg are among the national business media that have lauded PIRCH for its breakthrough customer experience and store design.

PIRCH has been compared to Apple and Tiffany in Forbes magazine. And its CEO, Jeffery Sears, was named one of the top disruptors in retail by the National Retail Federation.

Given such a record, I knew I had to include PIRCH in my new book, Extraordinary Experiences: What Great Retail and Restaurant Brands Do. When I set about researching the company, I thought I’d learn about some breakthrough design principles that informed the store design or an elaborate customer journey mapping exercise that had been used to develop the store experience.

What I discovered, instead, was that the extraordinary retail customer experience at PIRCH is grounded in a neuroscience approach.

The SCARF Model
When I interviewed Sears, he described how the store appealed to and engaged customers by using the **SCARF** model. The SCARF model was *introduced in 2008* by David Rock, CEO, Results Coaching Systems International.

SCARF is an acronym for five domains of human social experience, according to Rock:

- **Status** is about relative importance to others.
- **Certainty** concerns being able to predict the future.
- **Autonomy** provides a sense of control over events.
- **Relatedness** is a sense of safety with others, of friend rather than foe.
- **Fairness** is a perception of fair exchanges between people.

Given the insights the SCARF model provides about collaboration and influence between people, its application to organizational systems, change management, and leadership development is clear. The framework was quickly picked up by business and management circles, and *Strategy+Business* magazine highlighted it as one of the “Best Ideas of 15 Years.”

But Sears and his team at PIRCH were the first I had ever heard of to apply the SCARF model to the retail customer experience. Here’s how Sears described how it works at a PIRCH store:

**Meet the Barista of Joy**

A “barista of joy” — the position’s official title — welcomes people at the Bliss Cafe coffee counter with its bright red La Marzocco espresso machine at the entrance of each PIRCH showroom. Customers are offered a complimentary coffee or infused water, and as Sears told me, “That immediately raises your status, and so you check that box.”

“As you’re waiting for your coffee,” Sears continued, “the barista will ask, ‘Do you have an appointment? Would you like to be toured? Or would you [want to] wander through the store?’ What’s actually happening in that interchange is certainty. So you’ve created certainty about how the store works.”

If shoppers choose to wander, they’re told about the layout of the store, shown the “Dream Rooms” used for consultations, and welcomed back to the Bliss Cafe if they need help or have questions. This meets peoples’ need for the “autonomy” in the SCARF model.

“Relatedness” and “fairness” come through interactions with sales associates — PIRCH calls them “lifestyle experience advisors” — who, instead of using the usual sales pitches, serve free samples of food prepared by chefs using PIRCH appliances.

**Shower, Anyone?**

The hands-on nature of most displays in the store also meets these needs. In the “Sanctuary,” filled with working shower heads, saunas, and tubs, customers can schedule a time to test the showers — PIRCH will even provide bathrobes!

In the kitchen, they can watch or participate in cooking demonstrations; the “Patio” features working outdoor ranges and grills, plush furniture, and high-definition televisions; the restrooms are outfitted with several toilets, sinks, and faucets PIRCH sells.
When each shopper’s SCARF model needs are fulfilled, it “releases dopamine in the brain and that ties back to the concept of joy,” Sears said. The customer feels joyful because, he explained, “it was a genuine, thoughtful experience.”

I found this approach fascinating and helped me understand why PIRCH stands out as a leader in customer experience.

From the neuromarketing findings reported in recent years, I’ve learned that shopping can produce spikes in reward-circuit dopamine activity in the brain. And, now, thanks to PIRCH and the SCARF model, I see how retailers can use specific neuro-triggers to design extraordinary customer experiences.

* * *

Learn about other retailers taking extraordinary actions in Denise Lee Yohn’s the new book, *Extraordinary Experiences: What Great Retail and Restaurant Brands Do* – available now. Blending a fresh perspective, twenty-five years of experience working with world-class brands including Sony and Frito-Lay, and a talent for inspiring audiences, Denise is a leading authority on building and positioning exceptional brands. Denise is also the author of the bestselling book *What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles That Separate the Best from the Rest* (Jossey-Bass).

Join 23,647 smart marketers like you. Better results, less money! Get my newest, best ideas free!
Customer Success is the business methodology of ensuring customers achieve their desired outcomes while using your product or service. Customer Success is relationship-focused client management, that aligns client and vendor goals for mutually beneficial outcomes. Effective Customer Success strategy typically results in decreased customer churn and increased upsell opportunities. The most memorable customer experiences are the ones that create an emotional connection with customers. In fact, businesses that use emotional connections outperform their competitors by 85% in sales. A great example comes from Zappos, the popular online shoe store. That’s success any human can understand. 10. Encourage engagement. The quickest path to a better customer experience is engagement, engagement, engagement. You need to create customer interactions that produce engagement. For brick and mortar retail brands, the battlefield is now online and goes far beyond just having a web presence. The experience online needs to be as if the customer was in a physical store: a knowledgeable sales rep who recommends and suggests the right product. As we mentioned, customer experience is a customer’s overall perception of your company, based on their interactions with it. Comparatively, customer service refers to specific touchpoints within the experience where a customer requests and receives assistance or help for example, calling an operator to request a refund or interacting via email with a service provider. By having a measurable indicator of CX, you can track how it improves (or worsens) over time and use it to evaluate the success or failure of changes you make that might be affecting your customers. Here are four top metrics used by CX professionals to track customer experience over time: Customer Effort Score (CES). Retail Customer Experience. 2,779 likes · 5 talking about this. Retail Customer Experience is devoted to helping retailers differentiate on experience. Training and business culture veteran Jim Knight was the opening keynote speaker at this year’s Retail Customer Experience Executive Summit, held August 13-14 at the Hard Rock San Diego. In this video, he talks about the importance of not only finding and hiring the right people, but keeping them - and why managing your people is similar to being married.

6. NRF: Intel demonstrates smart shelves for retail. 1. Hear Lou Carbone, the father of customer experience, in this brief recap of his closing keynote at our summit this year. 2. See All. The basic retail experience hasn’t changed much over the years: go into a store, look for the right product and make a purchase. Artificial intelligence has the potential to completely transform the traditional retail experience and take it to the next level with personalization, automation and increased efficiency. And it’s already happening! Customers don’t have to push a button; their brain signals are enough for the system to know how they feel about each item. 12. West Elm Connects Style And Products. Customers used to bring in physical style boards of furniture items they liked, but now furniture retailer West Elm does it through AI. Blake Morgan is a customer experience futurist. Blake is the author of two books on customer experience.