

Growth Points

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Slow People Down

Have you ever noticed how supermarkets plan their layout to slow people down? They do not want to speed you on your way, but rather try to stop you in your tracks with physical impediments and offers you cannot refuse.

According to *Consumer Reports*, here are how supermarkets are laid out, and why.

First, upon entering the main doors of a supermarket you are likely to discover a barricade of seasonal fare, such as garden or cookout

“Design your church to slow people down so they linger in fellowship with each other.”

—Gary L. McIntosh

supplies in the summer. In October you will run into a wall of Halloween candy, and just before Easter a garden of lilies. This is all meant to slow you down as you enter the store.

Second, placed close to the entrance is the produce department highlighting colorful displays of fruits and vegetables. These foods are stacked in well designed piles that are often sprayed with fresh water to keep them glistening with that “just picket” look. The attractive displays showcase the store’s image.

Third, moving into the store it quickly becomes obvious that related items are displayed together. This is done to stimulate impulse buying, but also for your convenience. It just makes sense to put the salad dressing next to the lettuce and tomatoes.

Fourth, near the front isle in most of our modern supermarkets is a bank of flowers. The floral display provides another beautifying aspect to the store, but also attracts impulse buyers. The sweet smell of flowers reminds shoppers of fond memories as they linger among the display, sniffing the aromas.

Fifth, toward the rear of most stores are island-shaped

refrigerated cases that are placed in the middle of wide isles. Not only do these cases allow shoppers to pick products from each side of the case, but being in the middle of the isle they slow down shoppers.

Sixth, products that you buy on every trip, such as milk and other dairy products, are inconveniently found in the back of the store. No sense encouraging shoppers to rush in and out for a gallon on milk or a pint of butter.

Seventh, on the end of each isle are found sale items. These “endcaps” are designed to be viewed by as many shoppers as possible.

Eighth, a bakery is often placed near the front entrance on the opposite side of the produce department. The enticing aroma of fresh baked bread hits you as you enter

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Showcase your values near the front entrance.

It is all designed to stop you in your tracks.

the store. Why do you think bakeries always offer fresh baked French bread, or cookies, or roasted chicken? It is all designed to stop you in your tracks.

Ninth, items with high markup costs, like batteries, gum, and magazines, are found at the check out counters. These items offer a last chance for an impulse buy while standing around waiting to check out.

The bottom line is that everything about a supermarket store's layout is carefully designed. The aisles have to be large enough to allow traffic to flow, but not so large that people cannot be drawn to the items on the sides of the aisles. It is a careful balance for if a store's aisles become too congested, shoppers skip that aisle and move to the next one.

So, what can we learn from the design of a supermarket that will be helpful to the growth of our church? The one main takeaway is to design our church facilities to slow people down.

As I have observed churches through my consulting ministry over the last few years, it is apparent that churches are designed to move people quickly out of the building. Who has not noticed visitors leaving a worship auditorium move straight out the doors and into their cars without talking with another person? Regular worshipers also find it convenient to leave quickly, and in the process neglect the opportunity for fellowship with other worshipers.

Recently I attended a rather large church that worshipped in a beautiful facility. The wide hallways made for a comfortable walk from the lobby to the worship area, but nothing stopped worshipers from walking just as fast back to the lobby and to their parked vehicles.

This church, and others, would be wise to place several coffee carts in the middle or along the sides of the expansive hallways.

People with a cup of coffee, juice, or a donut in their hands tend to stop and talk awhile.

It might also be wise to place a few racks of information in the middle of the hallways so people have to walk around them. Like supermarkets, placing related items on the same rack will be helpful. For example, one information rack could include all items related to children's ministry, another all information related to adult programs, and still another might have lots of material on opportunities for service.

In the same manner that produce, floral, and bakery displays provide a positive first-impression for supermarkets, churches might consider ways to showcase the church's values or warm welcome just inside the main entrance.

Putting It to Work

What impression do guests receive when they enter your main doors? How could you showcase your church better?

Do people rush to their cars following the worship service? How could you creatively slow people down so they linger in fellowship longer at your church?

What other insights can you see from the way that supermarkets design their layout?



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