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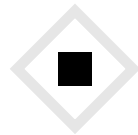
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# RETAIL DESIGN THEORY



Four experts talk about how to keep customers engaged, point them toward specific merchandise and increase the likelihood of repeat business

By PATRICK WAGNER

**I**n the past, cannabis sold itself. Strains, packaging, branding, let alone the design of a store, didn't matter as much as it does in today's highly competitive environment. But with the floodgates open along the West Coast of the U.S., and Canada preparing for legalization, cannabis consumers now have more retail options than ever.

As the market continues to grow, licensed retailers should prepare themselves for stiffer competition. Terms such as “decompression zones,” “vistas,” “speed bumps,” “power walls” and “butt-brushing” may seem nonsensical at first, but there is a science to retail layouts. Major retail companies outside the cannabis industry know that minor discrepancies —

such as bad lighting, cumbersome layouts or poor signage — can not only lead to a bad consumer experience but can also reduce sales and even deter customers from returning.

In order to better equip marijuana retailers, Marijuana Venture spoke with experts outside the cannabis industry for a crash course in retail design theory.

## THE DECOMPRESSION ZONE

Shoppers typically make snap judgments about stores as soon as they walk in the door.

According to Georganne Bender, the average customer decides whether they like a retail store within 10 seconds of entering — if not quicker. This makes the first five to 15 feet inside a store — an area commonly known as the “decompression zone” — critical for attracting repeat customers.

“Its only purpose is to allow customers to slow down, stop thinking about whatever they're thinking about and refocus on shopping,” she says.

Bender and her business partner, Rich Kizer, are internationally acclaimed, award-winning retail designers, strategists



and consultants who have helped thousands of retail businesses across the world better their bottom lines through their firm, Kizer & Bender. Although the decompression zone is extremely important for the success of retail stores, Bender also describes this area as a “no-man's land” where consumers seemingly miss anything placed within its range — so it should remain open and uncluttered.

“Don't put anything in the decompression zone that you want customers to see,” Bender says.

The decompression zone isn't limited to

the front entrance either; Bender says every point of entry for customers should have its own decompression zone.

“You have to have a path of lighting for when people walk in the door,” adds Leslie Stern, owner and designer of Leslie M. Stern Design Ltd. “It has to be lit for a wide range of ages, not just for someone in their 20s.”

Stern has worked in industries ranging from designing a British grocery store chain all the way to a medical marijuana dispensary in the suburbs of Chicago. Stern

says to lead customers from the decompression zone and into the vista of the store by keeping brighter lights on the product and signage and slightly dimmer lights along walking paths.

One of the first things Bender and Kizer teach retail store owners is that consumers “bring with them what they see in other stores.”

“We, as consumers, look for commonalities in how things are displayed,” Bender says. “Is it warm and familiar or is it cold and unknown?”