

STORES

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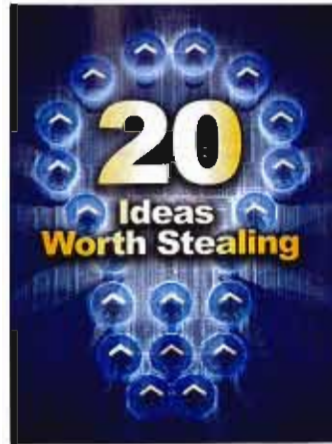
Ideas Worth Stealing

BY SUSAN REDA, EDITOR

Fresh ideas — be they brilliant, clever, head-scratching or even a bit kooky — were everywhere you turned during the past year. Retailers found extraordinary ways to connect with consumers, tap their collective knowledge and opinions and get them to evangelize on their behalf. They experimented with new technology, dabbled in new business endeavors and created in-store experiences that left shoppers wowed.

Yet ideas are just starting points — springboards to something greater. As experts have said time and again, the real trick to creating something great has less to do with inspiration and almost everything to do with execution.

Here are 20 ideas we think you should take a closer look at. Are they the best of the best? Maybe — maybe not. It's probably best to think of them as conversation starters — perhaps at your first brainstorming meeting of 2011.



TAKE IT TO THE CROWD

Ed Schmults, CEO of Wild Things, needed to decide on a new logo for the outdoor gear company. He was sitting with 14 different iterations of the logo in hand — and a board meeting in 72 hours, during which he was to present his choice.

Working with First Insight, a Pittsburgh-based software company that specializes in capturing consumer opinions, Schmults was able to garner insight from some 800 geographically and demographically diverse consumers. Using a tool that allowed consumers to indicate whether they strongly liked or disliked each logo, the top choices quickly emerged.

“I was able to put together a package indicating my picks, back-up those choices with empirical data — which is enormously difficult to do with something as subjective as a logo — and deliver it to the board on time,” Schmults says. “As a decision-maker, the ability to get an unbiased view is invaluable. It takes a good deal of risk out of the decision, and it takes emotion out as well.” Schmults has no intention of replacing the company’s planners, but he does intend to tap First Insight to validate decisions on pricing and color choices.

First Insight CEO Greg Petro says his solution provides retailers with forward-looking views on issues affecting consumer behavior that help “validate anything from pricing to position to planning. The ability to vet a decision based on consumer information allows the user to have a level of confidence they didn’t have before.”