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## Experiencing the company brand through custom commercial architecture

It's always been the role of architects to conjure an emotional response from people through building design. Homes, churches, governmental landmarks all make a statement. Today, we see a growing trend toward similar strong design in commercial buildings, particularly retail.

Thankfully, we no longer are in the age of the big gray box. Sophisticated consumers are demanding a new experience, one that's affected by the exterior and interior architecture of the space. Thus the building becomes much more than protection for the products inside; it becomes part of the overall brand, along with the service, product and culture of a company.

Employing an architect to create a custom commercial building that engages



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the consumer is truly powerful. When done well, architecture doesn't just attract visitors — it defines the customer experience. This is accomplished in a few ways.

First, architects understand how people move through spaces and can influence buying behavior through design. In some cases, it can be as simple as equating movement

of people to that of water. When the goal is to move people quickly, for example at checkout, the space should be narrow and straight. When lingering is desired, the spaces should be wider and meandering.

Likewise, Whole Foods' architecture puts consumers at ease with a comfortable, rich atmosphere that reflects the company's — and customers' — commitment to organic products and sustainable design. The quest for quality food and service is reflected in the choices of materials, forms and packaging.

Mark Husson, retail analyst of HSBC in New York, says, "The Whole Foods brand is not just a place to buy food, it's a lifestyle brand. The Whole Foods brand has a lot of different dimensions to it, and there's also the element where you feel like you're saving the planet because they're so green. So it's a multidimensional brand." (Arizona Republic, Aug. 14).

Burberry's New York store is able to convey its brand through the use of a plaid curtain wall that suggests the plaids seen in the company's signature fabric. The facade of the building draws consumers in based on a pattern that already has proven successful and timeless in their clothing design, as well as giving instant brand recognition.

"The distinctive design of the store as well as a footprint which effectively dou-

Second, architects align their work with the overall experience. Great attention is placed on customer service and packaging in retail, but space design also is important.

A floor plan and design should reflect the company's image from arrival into the store, through circulation throughout the store, to departure. The alignment creates resonance and can affect buying behavior.

If people associate a certain product or service with inviting, comfortable spaces that attract like-minded people, that feeling will develop into much more than a purchase. It becomes an experience. Many companies have seen that an investment into this experience drives customer sales and customer retention.

A prime example of architecture rein-

bles the square footage of our original New York location gives us a dynamic environment in which to present the depth and breadth of our collections," said Burberry USA President Eugenia Ulasewicz in a PR Newswire announcement.

When retailers and commercial developers work alongside an architect, they quickly notice the effect of architecture on the bottom line. More local retailers have chosen this path, seeing their profits double or triple within the first quarter of customizing the exterior and interiors of their buildings.

This effort involves more than using the brand's logo color to paint the walls. It's creating a space to evoke a mood that fits the brand, such as a restaurant designed to feel like the natural surroundings of its fare or a store built to re-create the environment for which its products are made.

For as long as consumers continue to favor purchasing products and services in these thoughtful environments, the architecture will continue to play a major role.

The good news is we all benefit from well-planned architecture. After all, it's not just the targeted consumer who is affected by exterior architecture; it's the entire community.

forcing a brand is Apple's group of flagship stores. The company spends a large chunk of its marketing budget creating and maintaining these stores in order to make sure the buying experience is at a level that is in line with the product brand and architecture.

The sparse box façade with the simple, monotone apple logo foreshadows the sparse, clean, user-friendly product display inside.

The whole shopping experience, from the view approaching the building to the flooring material to the customer service, is in line with the brand, producing a comfortable experience for customers that encourages them to spend more time in the stores.

This is paying off for Apple. Compared to other retailers, the company has done extraordinarily well. Ron Johnson, senior vice president of retail for Apple, said in CNET News, "While other companies, such as Target, generate about \$300 per square foot, Apple generates about \$4,000 per square foot."

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