



MERCHANDISE TO RELIEVE PAIN POINTS

By: Andrea Syverson

When it comes to developing your merchandising strategy is PAIN on your agenda? That is, do you and your product development team actively talk about your customers' pain points in relation to your brand experience? Do you know where their product "splinters" are – where things break down for your customers as they use yours' or your competitors' products? Do you have a solid understanding of what may be your customers' frustrations? Do you know what's on their wish list or their "if only" lists? By concentrating quality time and energy on seeing things through your customers' lens, you will end up solving real problems for them. This will endear them to your brand.

Let's take a BrandAbout™ tour around a few industries and see the results of how some very smart merchants and marketers followed this process:

AMAZON

Jeff Bezos and his "one click and you're done" team at Amazon really hit the ball out of the park with the Kindle. For two years running, it's been their #1 bestseller and is described on their website as "the most-wished-for, most-gifted, and has the most 5-star reviews of any product on Amazon." Passionate reading aficionados can never be without a book by their side. This device solves the commuting or traveling reader's physical pain of lugging a bevy of books around. The Kindle makes it possible for readers to carry their entire library around quite compactly and effortlessly. Amazon could have stopped there – but they didn't. Pain was on their product development agenda and they went deeper into the reading experience and added these solutions to address issues that go beyond just the physicality of carrying books:

- **Free book samples** - read the first chapter for free before you decide to buy.
- **Whispersync technology** - saves and synchronizes your last page read, bookmarks, notes, and highlights across your devices.
- **Text size adjustment** to make reading more comfortable.

How can you push your product development efforts to address ancillary pain issues that are also are of paramount importance to your customers?

SMARTPAK

One of my clients, SmartPak Equine, started their business by solving a problem for customers. Here's how they describe it: "The patented SmartPak™ supplement feeding system has simplified the process of feeding horse supplements and medications, making it easier for thousands of riders to keep their horses healthier by ensuring their supplements are being fed correctly." Physically, the product provides a convenient and affordable feeding system for busy horse owners and barn managers. Emotionally, SmartPak delivers peace of mind to its customers.

The screenshot shows the SmartPak website homepage. At the top left is the SmartPak logo with a horse silhouette and the tagline "Smarter Horse Care." To the right, there are several promotional banners: "Call Us toll free 1-888-752-5171" with a "Contact Us Now" button; "Flat Rate Ground Shipping Only \$7.95" with a truck icon; "What are SmartPaks? Supplements Simplified" with a "Learn More" button; and a "View Cart" button showing "0 Item". Below these is a navigation bar with categories: "Equine Supplements", "Rider Apparel & Gear", "Tack & Equipment", "Horse Care", "Barn Supplies", "Equine Pharmacy", and "All Departments". A search bar is present with the text "Enter Item # or Keyword" and a "Search!" button. Below the search bar are links for "About Us", "Free Catalog + Email", "Horse Health Info", and "Start a SmartPak". A prominent banner reads "You asked. We answered. SmartPaks Ship Free" with a "Learn More »" link. The main content area features the heading "SmartPaks Simplify Your Life" and the subtext "Your daily dose of peace of mind and total control in a handy, compact size." To the left of this text is a list of four benefits, each with a blue checkmark: "Fed right every time", "Custom made and clearly labeled", "Delivered free every month*", and "Tightly sealed for maximum freshness". To the right is an image of three SmartPak containers filled with different colored supplements (brown, white, and dark brown). Below the image is a large digital counter showing "250,000,000" and the text "Over 250 million supplements served in SmartPaks!"

Paal Gisholt, the company's CEO, addressed the topic of pain points in an interview in *Dressage Today*: "Pay attention to the problems you experience as a rider or a trainer. What frustrates you? If there is a way to fix it, there may be a business there. Problem-solving businesses are the kind where word-of-mouth by motivated customers can lead to success. If people feel pain, they will take a chance on your product."

Since their founding in 1999, SmartPak Equine has become the country's largest online and catalog retailer serving the needs of the active and engaged horse owners. Like Amazon, they didn't stop solving problems for their customers. As a competitive rider herself, Melissa Hamlet, Vice President of Merchandising for SmartPak Equine, knew what was on women riders' wish lists. She created a shapewear product with them in mind. Here's how she describes it:

Finally, a comfortable solution to hiding bumps and bulges so that you look svelte in your breeches! SmartSlim® was designed by riders who know how uncomfortable

it is to wear pantyhose (or other torture devices) under your breeches to reduce the appearance of cellulite and help flatten the tummy. Many, many hours of testing in the saddle resulted in the design that we are proud to present to you. SmartSlim® is made of a moisture wicking fabric to help keep you cool even on the hottest days. Designed to be completely invisible under your breeches, SmartSlim® will be your little secret.

Is your merchandising staff spending “many hours in the saddle” learning about what’s on your customers’ wish lists?

HARLEY-DAVIDSON

Harley is another company that puts the subject of customer pain points on its strategic planning agenda....women’s pain points in particular. In an article entitled “Harley Shows Its Feminine Side” *BloombergBusinessWeek* reported that CEO Keith Wandell heard women all asking for the same thing: “When are you going to design a bike that’s more suitable for women riders?” Wandell and his team did something about it. They “introduced the \$8,000 SuperLow, designed to appeal to women and first-time riders. It has the lowest seat in Harley’s 32 bike lineup, making it easier to ride and it’s 150 pounds lighter than a typical Harley.”

The screenshot shows the Harley-Davidson USA website. The top navigation bar includes links for DEALER LOCATOR, OWNERS, COMPANY, BUILD YOUR HARLEY, SHOPPING CART, WISH LIST, and a SEARCH bar with a GO button. Below the navigation bar are links for MOTORCYCLES, LEARN TO RIDE, TRY A BIKE, H-D1 CUSTOMIZATION, PARTS, APPAREL, EVENTS, MUSEUM, and COMMUNITY, along with a Log in / Create a Profile link. On the left side, there is a vertical menu with links for MENS, WOMENS, YOUTH, COLLECTIONS, NEW, GIFT IDEAS, GIFT CARD, and WISH LIST. The main content area features a large banner for the Pink Label Collection. The banner includes a woman wearing a Harley-Davidson leather jacket and a pink t-shirt. Text on the banner reads: "INTRODUCING THE PINK LABEL COLLECTION FOR WOMEN", "On this road, no one rides alone. Show your support with the Harley-Davidson MotorClothes Pink Label collection - gear and apparel with a purpose. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this collection will be donated to Breast Cancer Network of Strength®, to support the YourShoes™ 24/7 Breast Cancer Support Center.", "LEARN MORE ABOUT BREAST CANCER NETWORK OF STRENGTH®", "I'M A WOMAN. A DAUGHTER. A SISTER. A MOTHER. A FRIEND. A FIGHTER. A RIDER. I'M A BREAST CANCER SURVIVOR.", and "TIA. A SURVIVOR". At the bottom of the banner, there are images of a jacket, a helmet, sunglasses, and a t-shirt. The text "SHOW YOUR SUPPORT WEAR THE PINK LABEL COLLECTION. NEVER ALONE." is also present.

It's this kind of pain-driven, "if only" merchandising that sets Harley apart from its competitors and encourages tattoo-worthy brand love.

Are you listening to what your customers are telling you – subtly or not-so-subtly? What actions are you taking?

GAP and MiB

Women's fashion retailers know that "one size fits all" doesn't work when it comes to dressing the American woman. And they know that those who cater to the multitudes of women outside the bell curve provide solutions to fit dilemmas that truly address pain problems. Here are two examples:

GAP wanted their petite customers to know that they took their clothing challenges seriously. On their website, they clearly articulate 9 ways that the merchants at GAP sized their clothes for smaller frames:

GAP \$20 OFF YOUR PURCHASE OF \$80 OR MORE. ONLINE ONLY. ENDS 3/12. Keyword / Style #

1969 / WOMEN / BODY / MEN / KIDS / BABY / SALE / STORES / MAG

WOMEN

Special Sizes

- ▀ Petite
 - Ts & Tops
 - Shirts & Blouses
 - Sweaters
 - Dresses & Skirts
 - Shorts & Capris
 - Premium Pants
 - Casual Pants
 - Jeans
 - Outerwear
- Tall
- Maternity

Features

- New Arrivals
- Modern + Design
- Cardigan Craze
- Tread Lightly
- Our Favorite Looks
- Swim Collection
- Customer Favorites
- Top-Rated 1969 Jeans
- FEED USA Bags

Departments

- Ts & Tops
- Shirts & Blouses
- Hoodies
- Sweaters
- Dresses & Skirts
- Shorts & Capris
- Premium Pants
- Casual Pants
- Jeans
- Outerwear
- Scarves & Umbrellas
- Belts
- Handbags
- Shoes
- Piperlime's shoe picks
- Socks & Legwear

FOR WOMEN 5'4" AND UNDER

GAP PETITE

Your favorite styles specially fit for your smaller frame. Exclusively online. Sizes 00P – 16P and XSP – XLP

Looking for petite measurements?
[SEE OUR SIZE CHARTS](#)

NARROWER SHOULDERS

HIGHER ARMHOLES

SHORTER SLEEVES

SHORTER LENGTH

HIGHER WAISTLINE

NARROWER HIPS & WAIST

SHORTER RISE

HIGHER KNEE POSITIONING

SHORTER INSEAM

These quick callouts immediately let their petite shoppers know that these are clothes they can count on.

MiB caters to a different segment but cares just as attentively. Here's how the company describes itself: "The only company in the world that offers quality and stylish plus size women's clothing in sizes 22-48 (1X - 8X). Unlike almost every other plus size company out there, we *only* make plus size clothing. We specifically design the fit and style of our clothing for women size 22+ to allow us to focus on what will look good on you instead of ramping up a size 6 and hoping it will work. Our designs celebrate your curves! Our clothing is of the highest quality, constructed from the finest fabrics with stylish designs. Along with offering beautiful and stylish plus size women's clothing, we are a socially responsible and environmentally friendly company."

The merchants at both these multi-channelers know their customers intimately and have worked hard to provide real solutions to these women's frustrations.

Are you addressing your customers' concerns thoroughly and in ways that clearly the customers you "get" them?

Andrea Syverson is the founder and president of IER Partners, which has guided and strengthened brands of all sizes with savvy best practices for creating customers for life. Combining her passion of adventurous listening and working across diverse industries, her "outsider-insider" creative branding and merchandising expertise and objectivity has been valued by companies as diverse as Ben & Jerry's, Celestial Seasonings, CHEFS, Boston Proper, SmartPak, Spanx and World Vision. She holds an MBA and has dedicated more than 20 years to providing clients both domestic and international with innovative approaches to branding, product development and creative messaging. She is the author of two books in which she shares her hands-on approach for both brand building and creating customer-centric products that enhance brands: *ThinkAbout: 77 Creative Prompts for Innovators*, and *BrandAbout: A Seriously Playful Approach for Passionate Brand-Builders and Merchants*.