



Eric Samuel Green  
Global Visual Merchandising Director  
Eric\_green@vfc.com

## Q: Does the current economic environment present any unique challenges for effective in-store marketing?

**A:** Pragmatism and strategic planning are essential skills for marketers in the current economic environment. Historically, we as marketers focused on emotion to drive traffic and conversion. However, customer emotion and corporate profitability aren't as closely intertwined as they were in previous years.

With that said, it is crucial that all POP initiatives address the following: (1) Fact-based strategies with a focus on ROI, (2) optimizing financial spend and (3) flexibility and being nimble. Fact-based POP initiatives often pay for themselves because they tend to be more focused, quantifiable and ultimately cost-effective. Fact-based projects enable a company to allocate funds wisely and develop messages or tactics that work best for their arena. These tactics are proven and validated through an ROI analysis. The results of this ROI analysis should include quantitative and qualitative data that drive future implementations. The combination of fact-based initiatives with an ROI validation is the perfect mix for a successful POP launch.

Optimizing financial spend is the concept of making your dollars stretch further while assisting you to achieve multiple goals. A POP investment should increase brand awareness, build brand equity and drive customer conversion. I personally partner very closely with my POP manufacturers and utilize their knowledge to maximize overall market impressions. We have a responsibility and an obligation as business owners to encourage our vendors to find sustainable multi-faceted POP solutions. Innovation often surfaces from good vendor/retailer relations and the need to do more with

less. At The North Face we seek to develop POP tools that have an annual presence and can be used in various retail environments. We optimized our overall spend by achieving a consistent annual message, reducing waste by eliminating options and increasing customer impressions.

Flexibility and being nimble and agile are essential traits for a marketer to sustain in this environment. We need to keep our ears open to what the market is telling us if we want to be relevant. Developing annual plans that are fully loaded and without an option for revisions is not a wise decision. Let me be clear that we need and should be strategic with the future insight; however, we have to be prepared for change within that strategy. Some plans are scoped to one year, many to three years, and some to five to ten years into the future. I have witnessed many plans or initiatives become outdated because business owners didn't allow themselves room for reactionary measures. It's flexibility that allows you to address an immediate need in the marketplace and it's this acknowledgement that translates into customer conversion or increased traffic.

To summarize, there are many perspectives, models and approaches used to drive customer conversion. POP has proven to be an effective tool to drive conversion. The way a POP initiative is executed and managed is just as important as the overall message itself. This is why strategies based on fact with a focus on ROI as validation will ultimately be successful. We as marketers have a duty to champion this process and be ambassadors for strategic thinking.

Last and most important, an organization's strategic planners already know much of what will go into a strategic plan (this is true for business planning, too). However, flexibility in the strategic plan and the ability to be agile will ensure that key stakeholders are all properly prepared to provide a solution when the market has a specific need or significant shift.

If you would like to contribute to our ongoing dialog about important POP Topics please email Matt Baker: [bakerm@amdpop.com](mailto:bakerm@amdpop.com)



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