The Life & Death of Wow Sight & Sound by Simon Dell

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A marketing expert colleague asked me the other day 'so they're just shutting it down?'

The answer was in the affirmative. They are, indeed, just shutting it down. With the loss of the jobs, locations, branding and all trade.

The life and death of WoW Sight and Sound is a stark lesson to all business owners and any marketing expert. A stark lesson in what not to do when running a retail store. There is much background to the collapse, a large chunk of it unrelated to the core business, as well as a lot of economic woes and shifts in business patterns. But inside all of that, there are some key lessons.

1. You never asked me for anything.

I shopped at the Brisbane WOW a fair bit. A bought DVDs and Blu-Rays there. I bought three Mac computers. I bought a set of scales. I bought a battery charger. And never once did WOW ask me for my details. An email address, my postcode - some way of tempting me back in store. What about a newsletter? Ask me to join your Facebook page? Oh no. You don't have one.

If I were the WOW Sight and Sound Marketing Manager I'd be very disappointed with myself. In fact, Google that position and you can find the digital marketing manager on LinkedIn. Guess who he used to work for? Colorado Group. Hmmm.

2. You had interest free credit.

And you never told me. I had to find out through GE Creditline. I'd have bought more and bigger if I'd known before. Why didn't you tell me? I appreciate you didn't want to get into the Harvey Norman cycle of having a permanent interest free option as the sole driver for foot traffic, but there's a way of presenting that without sounding desperate.

3. You built a hotel.

If you've learnt nothing from any marketing expert at Apple - whose products you stocked quite well actually - is that there's no need to diversify for the sake of amusing yourself. Especially when the hotel you build has something like 100 plasma screens in and gives even normal people a fit looking at them. And wasn't overly successful too.

4. Your floor space was covered with products people weren't buying.

We watched Blockbuster and HMV go out of business. Yet you still gave over massive space to DVDs and CDs. Only three months ago did it appear the marketing expert realize this wasn't a good plan, and I saw some of your stores finally catch on to the digital world and start reallocating space. Probably a bit too late by then.

5. You sponsored the Broncos

That had very, very little bearing on whether I shopped with you. Sure the Broncos rocked up to your stores now and again, but did this drive sales? Did you analyze whether having the logo on their shirt sleeve actually put more bodies through the doors? I doubt it. Hindsight is the only exact science but maybe marketing expert could have spent the money better spent on consumer

engagement and education?

6. You were online....

...but the one time I visited your website...actually, I can't remember. That's not good. If I didn't go back, it can't have been any good. And what was with the www.1wow.com.au URL? I appreciate you couldn't get Wow.com.au but talk about make it harder for people to find you. Or remember you.

7. Location, location, location.

You were a destination venue, for what was fast becoming a commodity product. Bad idea. JB saw some sense and moved into high foot traffic areas. Maybe you should have done the same?

Despite the doom and gloom rubbish that spouts from Gerry Harvey, the Australian Retailers Association, any marketing expert and et al, on a weekly basis about the state of Australian retail, this channel for consumer goods is not dead. Far from it. I would suggest a re-birth is about to occur. Or an evolution. Or actually, a revolution. We're on the cusp of it right now. Consumers still want to pick things off shelves but what we've seen is how that action has evolved by the internet, home shopping, the mobile phone and growth of video.

And of course, in any revolution there are casualties. WOW Sight and Sound and Colorado Group are a couple. But any marketing expert will tell you, there will be more.

But there are ways and means of fighting back. Retail experience, price points, education, payment plans - these are things online simply cannot and will not offer, and things the consumer is willing to pay for and engage with. If back in 2008, post-GFC, a marketing expert and someone at WOW Sight And Sound had taken a long, hard look at their business and corrected the 7 points above, would they called in the administrators? Even if WOW Sight And Sound had just managed the first point, and they'd continued to engage me, perhaps that would have helped?

If you're in a similar situation, irrespective of the size of your business, then talk to a Brisbane marketing expert and get some help and direction for your business, before you end up like WOW Sight and Sound.

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