



CELEBRATING
55 YEARS

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The retail industry needs a strong 2012 performance, so here are a few resolutions

January 26, 2012 - Retail

So how are you doing with your New Year's resolutions? We make them at the beginning of every year and with the best of intentions. Sometimes they're fun and sometimes they're serious but they typically last just a few days, weeks or months. The retail industry needs a strong 2012 performance so here are a few resolutions that I hope are embraced and kept.

Gap resolves to reverse their decline by bringing back their successful television spots. The ads created a lot of buzz and certainly drove the sales of their jeans and tee shirts.

Boston's Mayor Menino resolves to fill in that hole on Washington St. and reinvigorate retail in Downtown Crossing. Retailers there have been suffering and there has been too many casualties - the venerable Filene's Basement among them.

Speaking of Filene's Basement, someone needs to resolve to bring back this iconic brand. The unquestionable trailblazer of discount retailing deserves another chance. There was nothing like the annual "Running of the Brides" or the savvy customer who would hide that cashmere sweater they had to have in one of the many bins on the sales floor and hoping it was still there when the automatic markdown kicked in. The "Basement" will be missed.

Another local retailer who needs to make a few resolutions is Talbots. Their first resolution is to not follow Filene's Basement into bankruptcy and liquidation. They further resolve to find new leadership and to reinvent their merchandising strategy. Talbots needs to find a way to bring their disillusioned loyal customers back while still competing for new ones.

Apple resolves to carry on Steve Jobs' legacy of thrilling us with the next big thing that will revolutionize how we communicate. Hopefully, Apple will also continue to provide us with the ultimate shopping experience. Not only are the products, branding and store environment cool but their customer service is world class. A few months ago, I was visiting an Ann Taylor store at the Christiana Mall in Newark, Del. and I made some time to visit the Apple store. The store had opened an hour early and it was packed. The amazing thing was that there seemed to be as many "blue shirts" as there were customers. Customer service is a hallmark of Apple's brick and mortar success.

All retailers need to follow suit and resolve to make customer service a priority in 2012. It's what consumers really want. Sure we are all looking for a deal but a little service will go a long way in driving sales and gaining market share.

I'm secretly hoping that Chick-fil-A has made a resolution to open more locations in the New England marketplace in 2012. Have you tried their chicken sandwich yet? Whenever I'm visiting malls down south, I make it a point to stop in the food court for one of their delicious chicken sandwiches and waffle fries. I'm not a big fan of food courts but Chick-fil-A is worth it so give them a try.

Barnes & Noble resolves to stay relevant in a digital world. Call me old fashioned but there's nothing like going to the bookstore and thumbing through the latest offerings of your favorite authors and looking for just the right one to take home. I appreciate that shopping online is convenient but I hope retailers resolve to keep their internet strategy as a complimentary business to their bricks and mortar model and not a replacement.

Another retailer that needs to resolve to stay relevant is Sears. The recent announcement that they will be closing a number of locations is an ominous sign of their long term viability. Sears faces an uphill battle against their numerous competitors. Sears is one the few retailers that compete in several categories. They compete against full line department stores and specialty apparel stores. They compete against Best Buy, Lowe's and Home Depot on electronics and appliances. They even compete against auto parts and repair shops and tire stores. A resolution to spin off a few of their core businesses in 2012 may put them back on track.

Retail industry professionals, retailers, architects and shopping center owners, all need to resolve to continue creating dynamic and exciting shopping environments that compel us to put down that iPad, get off the couch and get shopping. Perhaps that may help you with that resolution to exercise more?

So there are plenty of resolutions to get you thinking of a few of your own. What do you think will positively affect retail? If you've got a resolution to share I'd love to hear it. Post it on our Facebook page. I'll share them and perhaps yours will inspire others to join in.

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