Most Museum shops are often an afterthought - you know you need one but do what do you want it to do and how is it going to work?

Museum shops for the most part are focused on memorializing a patron's visit while, at the same time generating some revenue.

That’s a starting point, but there is so much more that can be accomplished in a well-planned and well-designed museum shop.

Ask yourself the following questions and consider the possibilities they suggest:

• **Is it a retail business?**
  
  Yes, it is a business and it needs to generate revenue and be profitable.

• **How do you do that?**
  
  Merchandise and merchandising - what you sell and how you present it to customers. Product selection and return on investment are the keys to profitability.

• **Are customers really interested in what you are selling?**
  
  What makes your products and merchandise unique? What qualities make it special and what qualities bring value to your visitors after they've left your museum?
• **How do you engage the customer and the community?**

Your shop should be an extension of the museum experience for your patrons. It can and should extend the length of stay, which will increase sales by enhancing the emotional connection to your museum or institution.

• **What else can should your retail shop do other than display and sell things?**

Museum shops can be affiliated with maker-spaces and studios sessions run by your institution. By providing a space to conduct educational lectures and demonstrations at or near the store you will further support the relationship between your visitors and your institution in addition to selling services and supplies.

• **How do you get patrons to return?**

Extend the experience beyond the premises – communicate with your customers after they leave the premises. Use social media to keep connected to your “fan base”. Loyal patrons who are engaged in and emotionally connected to your institution are more likely to seek ways to memorialize their visit after the fact or to make a return visit to your museum.
• How do you reach more customers and reach them more often?

The new partnerships between bricks and mortar, E-commerce and social media help foster a personal relationship to each customer on their terms.

• Can the museum store help your institution with gifting/fundraising?

The museum store can and should have a role in gifting and fundraising. Patrons with strong ties to the experience and who are return visitors are more likely followers. Parents and grandparents may gift a family membership to loved ones and renew annually if an opportunity is presented in the correct way. These memberships can be purchased at the store or online and can be accompanied by a commemorative memento. A particular season or event may be the trigger to reigniting a membership drive and can be promoted through your retail store.

So much time, effort, and money is invested into the planning, design, fabrication and installation of an exhibition that the visitor’s experience should be extended to the retail environment to create a grander, more fulfilling museum visit. The possibilities are endless and the ability to change and grow are paramount to running a successful museum store and keeping your patrons engaged.

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