

Look Who's Talking

Today's POP solutions are working harder than ever to entice customers — and electronic offerings may not be too far off.

By Bob Ingram

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Vestcom
International Inc.

Point-of-purchase (POP) materials are one of the last opportunities to capture the attention of the consumer in the purchase cycle.

Shelf talkers are timeless marketing tools, ubiquitous features of nearly every grocery store. What's changed, according to John Spitaletta, chief business officer at Clip Strip Corp., in Hackensack, N.J., is that marketing is “louder and bolder than ever before, even extending to the floor of the aisle. Of course, retailers give you more when you sell more.”

To stand out among the fierce competition at retail, marketers are pushing the limits of size by

going bigger and longer, Spitaletta notes. Video for the shelf edge has gained some traction, too, he says, and although obstacles such as power and noise have limited their reach so far, “stay tuned on that evolution.”

The Clip Strip, invented by Spitaletta's father in 1980, has evolved to include molded plastic, flat die-cut and metal strips, and the Sticky Strip, the company's latest innovation. It has adhesive-based mounting positions to which packages are stuck, but can be easily removed by the consumer. “This product eliminates the need to purchase hang tabs to hang impulse products on Clip Strip merchandisers,” explains Spitaletta.

Clip Strip has also added to its EG-Series of plastic shelf-edge sign holders, which create flush- or flag-style shelf-talking vehicles, Spitaletta says, as well as rolling out a take-one coupon book shelf talker. The company is also about to launch a POP printing division to create signage

for use with its array of sign holder products, while its magnetic Boot System is for gondola shelving.

The company is in the early research stages of adding electronic shelf talkers and is currently in discussion with Boca Raton, Fla.-based 30 Second Ads, which Spitaletta believes will be a leading player in at-retail video commercial spot distribution; its business model combines quality content for the retailer, free of charge, running throughout the day with relevant 30-second commercials.

Enhanced Shopper Engagement

At Vestcom International Inc., in Little Rock, Ark., Jeff Weidauer, VP, marketing and strategy, says that the goal for shelf talkers and other in-store POP materials haven't evolved much over time, although the retail environment certainly has.

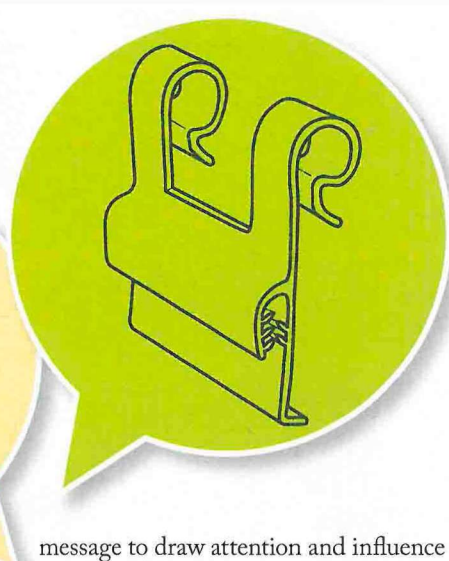
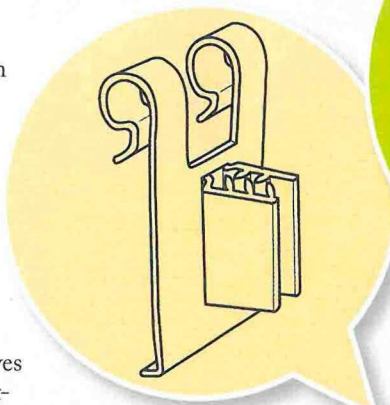
"Shelf talkers are intended to grab a shopper's attention," he explains, "by standing out — literally sticking out from the shelf, as well as with eye-catching creativity — and pointing her to a specific item or event. What's changed is the store itself, with more POP, more color and more signage, all vying for that shopper's attention."

Vestcom offers a suite of solutions that Weidauer says are designed to help retailers drive sales, reduce costs and more effectively engage the shopper. Among them: ShelfStrips, which are shelf-edge molding strips that put the planogram, item description and even marketing messages right on the shelf edge, ensuring planogram integrity and preventing temporary out-of-stocks from becoming permanent. Weidauer says they reduce shelf set time by 50 percent or more, and are great for what he calls "category color blocking," as well as marketing messages.

Vestcom also offers BannerStrips, which

Weidauer says are expanded ShelfStrips that "maximize the billboard power of the shelf edge, grabbing the shopper's attention and providing relevant information and education right at the point of decision."

Vestcom's newest shelf-edge innovation is Snap-Talker, which combines the price label, bib tag and shelf talker all in one unit, saving time and money with fewer parts and less labor to hang, while allowing a SKU-specific



message to draw attention and influence purchase behavior.

In regard to electronic shelf talkers, Weidauer says: "The appeal of electronic signage at the shelf edge has been taunting retailers for a generation, but so far none have provided the requisite ROI to make them viable. That's more true today than ever, as virtually every shopper already has a digital display device with them, and is interested in being able to use them to help shop."

The future of electronic shelf communication is quite literally in the hands of shoppers, Weidauer says, because they want to get information on their phones, and the shelf edge should make that information readily available via the use of bar codes, digital watermarks or iBeacon technology. His caveat: "There is no need for retailers to invest in digital signage that will be obsolete before it's rolled out — the customer has already done that."

John Thompson, VP of retail strategy and development at Minneapolis-based in-store media company Insignia, says that electronic shelf talkers will play a role in the future, but that they need to serve the needs of the retailer, the brand and the shopper. "Some solutions today are not very intuitive for the shopper to use," he asserts. "In lower-engagement categories, shoppers are on a mission and don't have time to try to figure out something complicated. Then on the retailer side, the electronic solutions tend to require expensive and complicated upfront/setup costs, which is a barrier for adoption."

Gary Frank, owner of San Francisco-based shelf talker provider ShelfWiz, adds, "Electronic shelf talkers currently present a very costly alternative to traditional shelf talkers. As price comes down, they'll take the place of traditional shelf talkers, but as with many electronic replacements, the soul will be lost. More technical difficulties will disable some electronic systems, and creativity to make interesting, artful shelf talkers may be limited."

Julia Schmidt, Insignia's VP of marketing, sums up: "We believe the revolution is coming to translate out-of-store social/engagement behaviors to an in-store shopper experience. The industry has yet to crack the code on how to do this in a way that is intuitive and easy for shoppers, and effective for retailers and brands, but it's on the way." **PG**

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