

CHAIN STORE AGE

The News Magazine For Retail Executives

February 1, 2010
(Circ. Online)

EMS Takes It Up a Notch

By Marianne Wilson



Video presentations are strategically placed throughout the store.

“When we started looking at SoHo, one of the challenges from our owner was to connect our priority sports to our video and product,” Wood said.

The retailer’s previous video efforts mainly involved taking a for-sale DVD off the shelf and dropping it into a player. For SoHo, however, the chain upgraded to an integrated, customized system, partnering with PlayNetwork, Redmond, Wash., which also provides custom-branded music to EMS.

“A little over a year ago, our contract with our music provider was coming to an end, so we went looking for a new vendor,” Wood said.

EMS ultimately chose PlayNetwork, whose extensive library of music and video capabilities weighed into the decision, according to Wood.

PlayNetwork worked with EMS’ marketing group to develop a sound that would resonate with the retailer’s core consumers, who reach across genders and age groups but share a love of an active outdoor lifestyle. The end result was an upbeat, modern and eclectic mix. The music is programmed to match the changing demographics of the store during its operating hours.

Eastern Mountain Sports has created a multimedia experience in its new flagship in Manhattan that reinforces the company’s outdoor sports heritage. The integrated audio and video system also works to entice customers up to the second level of the 18,097-sq.-ft. SoHo store.

“Video has been a part of our shops for a number of years, but we took it up a notch in SoHo,” said Jim Wood, director of visual presentation, Eastern Mountain Sports, Peterborough, N.H., which operates 64 stores in 12 states.

The SoHo location reflects EMS’ updated format, which has a more modern, urban loft-industrial feel and is larger than its older prototype. It puts the emphasis on the retailer’s priority sports: climbing, paddling, cycling, camping and snow sports.

For SoHo, PlayNetwork and EMS worked closely together to develop high-impact video displays that, combined with the music programming, create a consistent interactive brand experience. The company leveraged existing branded content and custom video, creating four in-store video presentations that are shown on LCD screens. Each one is targeted to a specific sport.

“We have four different zone presentations that emphasize our priority sports,” Wood explained, “and each one has content relevant to the particular activity.”

The content includes stills of EMS’ graphics, photos, specific brand messaging, tie-ins with the company’s e-commerce site and credit card program, along with content from sports DVDs the store sells.

The content, in five- to 10-minute loops, is updated on a quarterly basis by PlayNetwork.

The placement of the LCD screens is designed to move customers through the store.

“We’re using them to pull the customer from one section of the store to the next,” Wood explained. “The video also helps with wayfinding because customers can tell what section of the store they are in by what’s playing on the screen.”

Equally important, the video programming works to connect customers aspirationally to the products on display.

“Not every customer is a hero-level athlete, but we wanted to inspire customers in such a way as to have that ‘ah ha’ moment,” Wood explained. “Some of the video content does exactly that. We have one piece, for example, that shows a guy climbing a cliff. And customers will just stop and stare at it.”

The system, which required minimal hardware investment, utilizes two dual-channel video players (one player takes care of two zones). It is very user-friendly.

“The content is sent to the store on a DVD, which then gets loaded to a hard-drive player. It’s all automatic from there,” said Jody McKinley, VP direct sales, PlayNetwork.

EMS’ Wood agreed. “The manager just turns it on in the morning,” he said. “The updates are as simple as loading a DVD into a player.”

Looking ahead, Wood hopes to feature the video in additional locations.

“At some point, I want to make the video part of the customer experience in all our new and converted stores,” he said.