



# KING-CASEY REPORT

*Insights and Trends in Retail Branding, Merchandising and Design*



## 3-Dimensional Branding

Developing a Customer Experience that Differentiates

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## Developing a Customer Experience that Differentiates

A KING-CASEY REPORT by Howland Blackiston, Principal, King-Casey


### The “Sea of Sameness”

Have you noticed? There’s an underwhelming similarity among retail brands. Just look at the images to the right. These dining areas all look alike, don’t they? What do they communicate about their brand? Not much. How effectively do they distinguish their brand from the competition? Not very.

The same is true with many retail stores. One drug store chain looks much like the next. One supermarket brand is not very different than its competitor. The interiors (and often the exteriors) are typically anonymous and interchangeable.

### “3-D Branding” The Strategic Differentiator

At King-Casey we overcome the “Sea of Sameness” through *3-D Branding*. This strategy results in a unique and proprietary environment and customer experience that differentiates a brand from its competitors. We achieve this by visually communicating the essence of a brand by integrating brand identity, positioning, trade-dress and architecture. In this sense, we develop a three-dimensional interpretation of a brand. Everything the customer sees and touches is unique to this particular brand. The environment itself communicates to customers the



**Can You Identify These QSR Brands?**

These images show the interiors of some of the best-known restaurant chains in the world. But there’s no way to tell one from the other. These spaces are virtually “unbranded”. The same is not true with all brands (see the “best-practices” on the next page). *3-D Branding* can dramatically differentiate your brand from the rest of the pack by seamlessly integrating brand identity, positioning, trade-dress and architecture.

brand’s personality and distinction in the marketplace. Leading retail concepts understand that great branding is much more than a great logo.

### “Brand-Store Connection”

With *3-D Branding* the entire customer retail experience becomes a unique reflection of the brand.

Note that any retail store is actually a collection of many individual “customer operating zones”. Customers behave differently in each zone. Their

needs and expectations are different. By identifying these zones and understanding how customers behave in each zone, we can craft zone-specific design solutions that distinguish your brand from the competition. The brand becomes integrated with each and every zone (inside and outside of the store). Customers can see and feel what makes your brand unique. The decor, architecture, in-store communications and trade-dress reinforce the brand. This level of detail is often overlooked by retailers and retail product companies. Many stores do

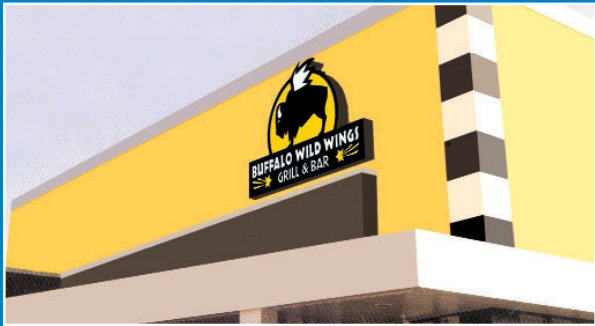
## 3-Dimensional Branding: Best Practices

### Customer Experiences that Differentiate

These retail concepts have strategically developed a 3-Dimensional brand strategy that communicates what makes their concepts different. Customers get a sense of the brand's personality, atmosphere and "retail promise". And there's another advantage of 3-D branding -- the stores become instantly recognizable from the street, acting as a magnet for loyal customers and enticing trial visits from new customers.



Everything about Bass Pro Sports' Outdoor World communicates what their brand is all about. Using a masterful blend of architecture, decor, trade dress and "Disney-like Theater", the environment visually communicates this is a fun place to shop for hunting, camping and fishing supplies.

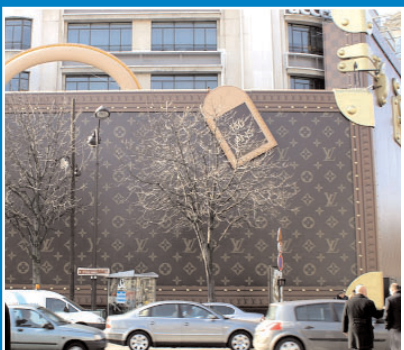


King-Casey's recipe for Buffalo Wild Wings' 3-D Branding integrates distinctive graphics throughout the interior and exterior. Using bold exterior design elements, this highly successful sports bar now projects a brand image that can be recognized from over half a mile away.



The U.S. Postal service asked King-Casey to develop a unique customer experience for a new retail concept.

"Postmark America" draws on the Postal Service heritage to provide an entertaining and educational venue that offers a broad array of apparel and gift items. The environment includes video walls, life-sized mail trucks, and a surprise and delight at every turn.



**Cover Image** Perhaps the ultimate execution of 3-Dimensional branding is the one-of-a-kind exterior of the Louis Vuitton store in Paris. Even from a distance, is there any doubt which store on this street belongs to Louis Vuitton? The famed brand monogram abounds. And there's no question what kind of products the company sells.

nothing to blend the brand with the customer experience (as demonstrated by the QSR dining zone examples seen on the previous page).

### Our Five-Step Process

So how does one go about developing a 3-D Branding strategy? The solution involves a systematic, five-step process, as follows:

**1.) Assess What You've Got.** What is the equity currently in your brand? What do customers say about you? About your identity? About your stores? How would you describe what makes you unique and different? What is the feeling or personality of your brand? What are the "attributes" (words and phrases) that best describe your brand? In the case of the Bass Pro example to the left, brand attributes would surely include things like "fun, excitement, adventure, outdoors, nature, quality". It's useful to secure objective feedback from customers, lapsed customers and non-customers. How do they see your brand? Do they agree that your 3-D Branding reinforces your brand attributes? Have them evaluate and critique each key zone (interior and exterior). Here's where interviews, surveys and consumer research comes in handy.

**2.) Identify What Has to Change.** Based on this assessment, what is it about your store design that needs changing? What needs improving? Where does your store design fall short when it comes to reinforcing and supporting your brand attributes?

**3.) Benchmark Best Practices.** In all likelihood, someone out there does a better job of 3-D Branding than you do. Why re-invent the wheel? Identify who are the leaders when it comes to 3-D Branding (they may be outside of your industry). Find out what they do well, and how they do it. The benchmarking process allows companies to make huge business improvements by "adapting" best-practices that have already proven to be both success-

## Effective Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a business tool that has come into vogue. A benchmark is a point of reference against which other things are compared or measured. In benchmarking, we identify practices that are world-class and then figure out the reasons for the world-class status. What are they doing differently than we are doing? The organization using benchmarking can systematically and continuously integrate this valuable knowledge into its own brand and services. We might benchmark branding strategies, in-store communications, menuboard strategies, order processing, or any number of other business processes or retail strategies. The process allows companies to make huge business improvements by “adapting” practices that have already been proven both successful and doable.

### Look Beyond Your Competitors

Although your first inclination may be to benchmark within your own industry -- don't. The best solutions probably come from an entirely different source. It's quite possible that none of your competitors are doing a world-class job of *3-D Branding*. Look for those organizations who have similar challenges, but who may be in an entirely different type of business or industry. Learn from the very best -- no matter who they are or what they do.

### The Army Benchmarks the Circus

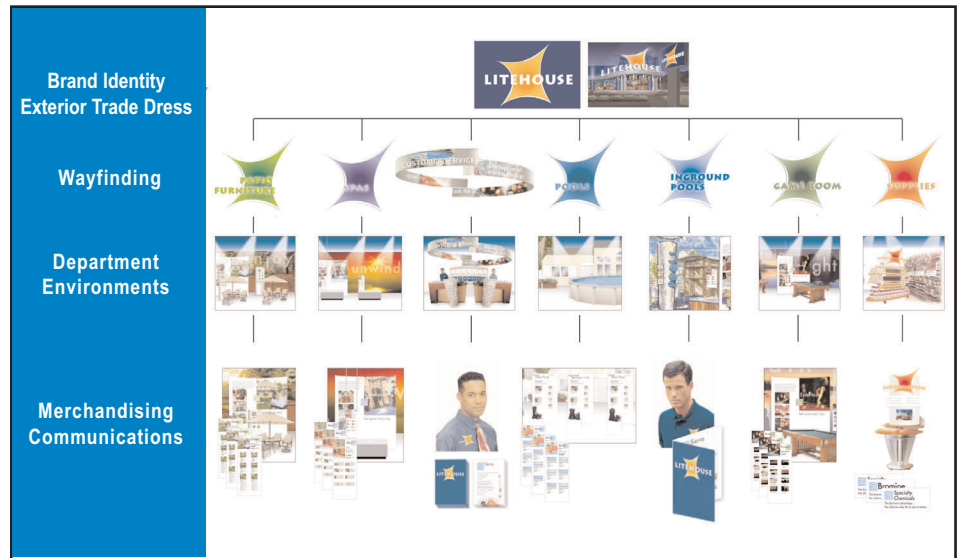
In the early 1900's, European generals couldn't figure out the best way to move soldiers, horses, and equipment from one place to another. So they looked around to see who did it best.

Their role model did not come from other armies. It came from a place that they least expected.

Night after night, using 100 specially-designed railroad cars, P.T. Barnum's World-Renowned Circus, almost miraculously was able to move over 1,000 people, a menagerie of animals, and tons of equipment from one town to the next.

Military officers who studied this “army of entertainers” learned the secrets of timely, efficient travel, which they then applied successfully to their own logistical military challenges.

The “lesson-learned” from this historical example is to expand benchmarking to include examples outside of your industry.



**Designing to a Brand Hierarchy.** Using a chart, map out how your brand is currently being applied to your retail environment. What's working well? What's not? Then develop design solutions that collectively result in a 3-Dimensional expression of what your brand is all about. In this retail example we see how new design strategies integrate the brand with the store's exterior trade dress; departmental wayfinding; department environments; product merchandising; and customer communications.

ful and doable. What you learn will guide your own *3-D Branding* strategies and optimize your store design. See the side bar to the left for more information on benchmarking.

**4.) Develop a Brand Hierarchy.** By prioritizing brand attributes and key branding elements you can begin to systematically develop design strategies that result in a unique customer experience. Customers can see and feel what makes your brand unique. For an example, see the above Brand Hierarchy Chart.

**5.) Validate Design Solutions.** Before implementing design changes or building prototypes, it's a wise idea to validate your new strategies. These new design solutions may look great to you and your colleagues, but how will your customers react? Once again, this is where it's useful to secure objective feedback from customers, lapsed customers and non-customers. Conduct consumer research to review the new design concepts. Have participants validate

whether your new strategies reflect and reinforce your brand attributes. This objective approach circumvents that nasty tendency to fall into the subjective trap: “I know what exactly must be done”.

**King-Casey** is a pioneer in retail consulting and design. For more than half a century, we have been building competitive brands for a broad array of retail companies by dramatically improving the customer experience at every point of contact. King-Casey provides a complete range of services including assessment, research, branding, visual merchandising, retail store design, and rollout. We develop innovative, turn-key solutions that result in increased customer loyalty, higher sales and greater ROI.

If you would like to discuss developing *3-D Branding* solutions for your business, please call Howland Blackiston at King-Casey. Telephone (203) 571-1776. Or visit our website: [www.king-casey.com](http://www.king-casey.com)