

You know the drill. You say, “Where do you want to have dinner?” Your friend says, “I don’t know. What kind of food do you feel like?” You answer “I haven’t had sushi in a while” and your friend responds “I really feel like barbeque tonight.”

My friend Sandy and I just had that exchange until I finally came up with the perfect solution—the grocery store!

Not just any grocery store, but the newest Whole Foods Market® that just opened in Denver. At more than 50,000 square feet, the Austin, TX-based company is committed to providing “the freshest, highest quality foods in an atmosphere that transforms grocery shopping into a sensory experience.”

Bright lighting brings out the colors in the rows and rows of fresh produce--Green, red, orange and yellow peppers; deep purple eggplant; luscious Colorado-grown peaches. The smells of smoking meat and freshly-baked bread waft through the air. Fish mongers hawking today’s catch compete with in-store cooking demonstrations.

Designed like a series of stores within a store, you can find homemade tortillas; an in-house coffee roaster; a brick hearth-fired pizza oven; a soup, salad and hot food bar featuring gourmet items as well as ethnic selections like Indian, Asian and Mexican meals. You can also enjoy a sit-down meal at either “Paradise Barbecue,” the seafood restaurant or the sushi bar.



The store has a wide selection of products to meet the growing demand for natural and organic foods as well as artisan cheeses, fresh-baked breads and an olive and antipasti bar. In case you can’t find something sinful at the bakery, you can always try the chocolate fountain for dipping cookies and fruit.

Throughout the store, smiling associates are in the aisles offering samples, cutting fresh Coho Salmon filets and carving thick rib-eye steaks to order. In another place, they’re demonstrating ways to use those piles of fresh, sweet heirloom tomatoes.

PAGE 1

And if all that isn't enough, the new store also has a wine shop called the Merchant of Vino specializing in regional family-owned wineries, microbreweries and organic vintages as well as selections from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, Argentina and many other areas around the world.



Despite its wide selection of fresh and prepared food, food staples and gourmet goodies, the real draw to the store is the experience.

Whole Foods customer service is legendary. Associates can provide recipes and recommend condiments to go with your new menu selections. Specialists in every area are expert in the array of products featured.

Whole Foods has transformed grocery shopping into a fun and exciting family activity. It's retail theater at its best where the store is an imaginative stage; the unique combination of ordinary and extraordinary products is the plotline; and the associates are highly-skilled actors.

If you've read this far, you may be wondering what this all has to do with you and with your business. The most common thread between your store and Whole Foods is your target customer. Your prospects are the same customers who shop in stores like Whole Foods and Wegmans, Crate & Barrel and Williams Sonoma, Chicos and Costco. They have been to Disney World and they've walked through the myriad of themed hotels in Las Vegas.

All of those experiences create consumer expectations of good merchandising and they want no less when buying consumer electronics.

What does your stage look like? Does it invite your customers to stay for the opening act? Or, does your store look like the play shut down months ago?

Are your associates so good that they're called back for an encore? Do your sales presentations make good stories that leave the listener eager to hear more?

Great retailers have found ways to put the fun back into shopping. Their customers want to come back time and again just to see what's new and different.

The new Whole Foods store is creating buzz. The price of gas may be near all time highs, but people are driving across town—past a host of other grocery stores—to see what the talk is all about. Even those who rarely frequent grocery stores are eager to see what the fuss is about.

More than anything else, customers are proving that they'll pay a premium for even the most basic commodities when those purchases are wrapped with a premium retail experience.

Maybe your store will be the next great retail destination. If so, your customers may even drive right past Whole Foods to get to you.

