



# STRATEGIC RETAIL ACTIVATION

## THE REALITIES OF RETAIL

demand that brands adapt to market shifts quickly by creating programs that can address changes in product offerings, retail trends, and budgets. The result is that speed-to-market and cost containment are top priorities...which create new risks. How do you meet those demands without making significant trade-offs?

The Carlson Group (TCG) started asking that question some time ago and responded by examining every step of a retail program — from strategic development through installation. The goal: compress timelines without compromising the Total Program Value (TPV) process.

Improving speed-to-market is easy if you're willing to cut corners, or pay a premium for fast turn-around. But today's budgets are tight, and cutting corners in any phase of development brings its own set of risks. It's critical to remember that program expenses go well beyond pure manufacturing costs. Nevertheless, when faster retail execution is driving, activation must be dynamic. This is a key tenet of TPV.

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TCG's strategic review of retail implementation enabled the development of an alternative path for programs that must be fast-tracked. What does that look like from the client side? Here's a look.

## THE CHALLENGE: FINDING TIME

### Plan and Act Strategically

It's important to engage your activation partners early in the strategic development phase. This may be obvious, but it rarely happens.

- › The tighter the timeline, the better it is to get everyone involved in defining the scope of work, budgets, and schedules.
- › Ensure stakeholder consensus during all phases of retail execution.
- › Start off on the right foot and position your team to be strategically efficient from the beginning.

### More Efficient Design

When your activation design team is involved from the outset, and parameters are defined and agreed upon by all parties, then creative energy becomes more focused. Design exploration and inspiration happen more fluidly, and reviews run smoothly and decisively.

- › Sketching designs can save time, versus creating more time-intensive digital 2-D or 3-D images.
- › Spending less time on formal presentations and full store renderings frees up time to focus on the inspiration, better solutions, and fosters a collaborative approach.

Recently, TCG partnered with Chaco footwear to develop an economical, durable display program to build awareness in the outdoor specialty retail channel. The final award-winning solution was



developed rapidly. Beginning with rough sketch concepts and material and inspiration boards, final design intent was established quickly, without moving into multiple rounds of 3D modeling.

### Functional Alignment

Traditionally, design formally hands the project off to engineering upon completion. The better way? Involve engineering earlier.

- › More parallel collaboration between creative and engineering saves time throughout the entire process.
- › At TCG, the design and engineering functions are very closely aligned, with USA team members even sharing the same workspace.
- › As a result, important design decisions get made concurrently, reducing the back and forth between departments.

### Global Synergy

Early collaboration between engineering and production is required to help expedite a program. TCG's China team is able to produce drawings while the USA team sleeps.

- › The China engineering partners are well trained in the TPV process and use the same technical platforms that are used throughout TCG.
- › With expedited engineering, it's possible to rapidly develop accurate pricing, while production tooling is accelerated.
- › Prototypes can be shared via web-based video or jpegs located on a client services web site or you may meet overseas to expedite decisions.
- › In more unique cases, it's possible to skip the prototype phase and review First Article Samples (FAS), or "First Offs" the production line, for final approvals.

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- › FAR LEFT: Inspiration was taken from Chaco's Facebook page, where brand loyalists share photos of their Chaco tan lines. This quickly became the foundation of the programs visual language.
- › ABOVE: Footwear risers and tabletop signs make prominent use of the abstracted metal "webbing", creating a cost-effective yet highly recognizable fixture detail.





### Focused Efficiency

There are many options for getting fixtures from China production to final in-store destinations.

- › Air freight is usually cost prohibitive. Less costly is to cross dock from port, and ship directly to store locations.
- › Valuable time can be saved on the ground by utilizing team trucking to run dedicated shipments 24/7.
- › Fixture inventory can then be shipped to warehouses in every region of the US.
- › Installation is the final opportunity to save time and costs. Standard industry practice is to send the same core team of people all over the country. Instead, TCG has installation partners in every major city who can get on site quickly and inexpensively.
- › Fast and smooth installation also depends on clear and simple instruction sheets and program playbooks.

- › TPV approach reflects holistic thinking at every stage — demanding that fixtures are designed, engineered and produced to be set up efficiently.
- › That includes thinking about installation early on, saving you time and money through the final step.

As an example, TCG partnered with Lucy Activewear to provide fulfillment, logistics management, and installation services for its very first Dick's Sporting Goods (DSG) Shop-In-Shops. A two-week rollout to 350+ locations included fixtures from three separate producers in six different store configurations. The accelerated activation was facilitated by detailed pre-installation site surveys and Store Management coordination. Further, digital photos and store sign-offs were distributed within 24 hours of completion and all project information was available to the client and retailer on TCG's proprietary web-based system.

- › ABOVE: Installation photo from a Lucy Shop-In-Shop at Dick's Sporting Goods.

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## CONCLUSION

- › In the rush against the clock, you don't want to lose what makes a program unique and effective.
- › Total Program Value enables this "due consideration" process and assists with maintaining key performance criteria.
- › TPV allows for a comprehensive view, from Discovery and Development through Execution and Evaluation.
- › Indeed, it's that strategic thinking that enables The Carlson Group to maximize opportunities while maintaining a brand's integrity across many presentations.

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As a strategic partner, The Carlson Group incubates, builds and sustains smart custom programs that deliver value across consumer retail experiences.

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