

IT'S YOUR CALL



Commodity or Charisma? What Kind of Retailer Do You Want To Be?

Rich Kizer and Georganne Bender

In a sea of sameness, the signs are all there. Signs that nudge us to be different, to stand out. And then there are warnings that tell us things just aren't what they used to be.

The warning on a hair dryer, for example, reads: "Do not use while sleeping." The warning on a bottle of dog shampoo: "Caution: The contents of this bottle should not be fed to fish." And on an information booklet, "Do not use if you cannot see clearly to read the information in the information booklet."

No, consumers aren't dumbing down, they're just busy. And maybe too bored with the "same old, same old," to pay attention to the things they should be paying attention to. This makes us

realize that your job as a retailer just got a little harder, because today your customers are harder to please.

So what is the point? You have to change – stand out, re-invent your store and embrace your own uniqueness! What warning signs have you missed? Perhaps your banker has warned you to watch your cash flow, or maybe you've begun to hear customers buzzing about a new competitor who's doing things that never even crossed your mind. And then we ask: "Why should anyone do business with you? What is it that makes your store special, unique and unforgettable?" We won't let you say what every other retailer says – we want to hear about you and your store.

So, you can choose to survive doing business as usual or you can thrive.

Here are some businesses selling ordinary items in extraordinary ways:

Sell The Experience

If you just want to buy a book, go to a big-box book store, but if you want to be immersed in a literary experience go to Town House Books & Café in St. Charles, IL. There's nothing basic about this book store. The fact that it's housed in an historic 1853 home is one of the reasons customers flock to Town House Books; owner David Hunt is another. Walk in the door and David will greet you like an old friend. Town House is so cozy, you'll just want to grab a book and spend the afternoon. They'll even feed you: the Café serves up soups, desserts and more made from scratch each day. And Town House Books is

big on events, so you're just as likely to meet an author at a book signing, encounter a book club, or enjoy live music in the Café. Visit Town House online at <http://www.townhousebooks.com>.

When you need to add to your growing collection of 400 shoes, check out Sensual Steps Shoe Salon in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood. Owner Nicole Jones has created one impressive store, but she didn't stop there. You like the store? Great! Hold your next party at Sensual Steps and your guests can shop while being pampered with manicures, pedicures, and other special services.

With her "Heels on Wheels" shoe-shopping party to go, Nicole's store is a moving experience. Imagine how fun it would be to have a bright pink Hummer pull up in front of your house, ready to thrill you and your friends with "drinks, desserts, handbags and shoes galore, ready to serve and pamper you like you've never been served and pampered before." Check it out at <http://www.sensualstepsinc.com/>.

It's always Saturday morning at Cereality, a restaurant that serves only cereal and toppings. Cereality is proud of the fact that it's able to introduce diners "to a place with absolutely nothing new." Cereality offers dozens of hot and cold brand-name cereals you can combine to your little heart's desire, served-up by pajama-clad Cereologists. Besides a sudden craving for Count Chocula, spend time on their Website (<http://www.cereality.com>) and you'll have loads of fun learning all kinds of important things, like their motto: "97 percent of Americans like cereal. 57 percent like sex. We've got cereal!"

Why does Cereality work? Because it's a totally new concept that's based on things we all know and love. You're not buying a bowl of cereal – you're buying an experience.

Get It?

Barbara and Dan Sanford, and Sandy and Bob Hiorns get it. Barbara and Dan and Sandy and Bob own Launching Success Learning Store in Bellingham, WA.

We first met these four Charismatic retailers at NSSEA's Ed Expo 2005

when they were planning to move their store to a new location, 2.5 times larger than their current spot. It was a huge undertaking, but attention to even the tiniest detail made the move as uncomplicated as possible. Their hard work paid off because the store is thriving in its new location.

Launching Success customers enjoy a schmorgesborg of retail delights: The Savings Club gives customers the opportunity to save; whenever a customer purchases \$125 in merchandise, he or she is rewarded with \$10 off of their next purchase. The Wish List works like an on-line gift registry, allowing registered customers to get the gifts they really want. Launching Success also hosts a variety of on-going classes and tutorials.

And Barbara and Dan and Sandy and Bob are big believers in Shoppertainment, hosting at least two in-store events each month. Game Night and Rhythm Camp are two customer favorites. The cool thing is that Launching Success has over 6,000 email addresses in its data base, so customers can be alerted to an upcoming event, or notified about what's new, hot and happening in a snap with monthly e-mail blasts.

Launching Success is definitely run by four Charisma Retailers – we know we're in for a treat whenever we hear from Barbara or Sandy or Bob or Dan. Visit them on-line at <http://www.launchingsuccess.org>.

Charisma Sells

So what's the difference between these retailers and their competition? Easy. We've decided there are two kinds of retailers today: Commodity Retailers who make no effort to do much more than they are supposed to do. Commodity retail employees are there just to collect a paycheck. There's no customer buzz about town and no fizz on the sales floor, merely shelves full of stuff.

And then there are Charisma Retailers™ who thrive on creating an experience that surrounds customers with a feeling they can't get anywhere else. Charisma retail associates share the same values as the store's owner or manager: they are there to serve and

delight customers.

Any retailer, regardless of what they sell, can be a Commodity Retailer or a Charisma Retailer™. It's a choice that's theirs to make. Charisma Retailers™ instinctively know they must live in the present while keeping one eye on the future. They read the signs and heed the warnings. They know that the special things they do for customers today, will be the expected things of tomorrow, so they have to always be on the look out for new ideas. And they know that competition isn't going to ease up, so they have to rise above it.

We're committed this year, in our articles and our presentations, to bring you the lessons of Charisma Retailers™ so that if you're not there yet, you soon will be. We'd like a commitment from you, too. While the concept of the Charisma Retailer™ is still fresh in your mind, sit down in a quiet room with a notebook and pencil. Let your mind wander, imagining what your store will be like a year from now. Who will be your customers and what will they demand of you? What aren't you doing today that you need to in order to meet future challenges? Keep this notebook handy and do this exercise for fifteen minutes each week before you go to bed.

In time, you'll be amazed at how quickly the ideas begin to flow, multiply and become reality. Before long, the retail status quo won't be good enough for you – you'll have crossed over from commodity retailing into the rare air Charisma Retailers™ breathe every single day.

Rich Kizer and Georganne Bender are retail anthropologists. They stalk and study that most elusive of mammals – the retail consumer. In 2004 they were named two of the Retail Industry's Most Influential People. Kizer & Bender have been featured on ABC National News; their client list reads like a Who's Who in American business, and you'll find their Street Savvy articles in a variety of publications. Their popular column, "Georganne & Rich on the Road", which appears in Craftrends Magazine, won the American Society of Business Publication Editors (ASBPE) Award of Excellence in 2004 and 2006.