

# Suggestive Selling Equals Success

By Rich Kizer and Georganne Bender

**H**ow would you like an additional \$48,000 in profit this year, without having to do very much to get it?

Stupid question? Maybe, but too many retailers do not take advantage of the simple sales technique that will help them dramatically increase sales and profits. We're talking about Suggestive Selling; or maybe you know it as Add-on Selling. Whatever you call it, it is the art of selling a customer the original item he or she came in to buy, plus additional items that complement the original item.

What a perfect topic to begin before the back to school season! Yes, that's what you do: you are in the sales business and selling the merchandise on your store's shelves is what it's all about. If you don't sell that product that UPS delivers each week, then you don't have a store. You have a museum.

We like to ask retail sales associates if they typically add-on to the original sale. Guess what? They all say they do. No, they don't. That affirmative answer is just an auto-response. We challenge you to put down this magazine and go out to your sales floor right now and ask each of your associates if they practice suggestive selling. They'll all say yes. But later on stop and observe them with customers to see if they really do. We'd be willing to bet that the majority of them do not even attempt to add-on.

Just last week we stopped in seven stores at our local mall. We had a sales associate assisting us in each store, and

in each store we made a purchase. But not one of those associates attempted to add on to our original item. Except at McDonald's. At McDonald's the associates asked every customer if they wanted fries or a beverage to go along with their sandwich. If McDonald's associates can master suggestive selling, so can your associates.

There is big money in this simple technique. Let's say, for example, that your store does \$1,500,000 in retail volume, with a keystone (50 percent) markup based on retail. Let's presume that the average sale in the store is \$25, which means the store makes 60,000 of those average sales in a year.

Let's also presume that every associate in the store has embraced suggestive selling. If only one in every five customers bought just one more item, in addition to the original item they came in to buy, 12,000 transactions would be positively affected. If that one additional item had a retail value of \$8, that would represent a retail sales increase of \$96,000.00.

Without suggestive selling, that additional \$96,000.00 in suggested retail sales would never be realized. At a keystone markup, these additional sales would give the store an easy \$48,000 more in profits – and our example was based on only one in five customers buying an additional item. Try this exercise using your store's numbers to calculate your own sales-building possibilities.

In addition to putting money in your pocket, suggestive selling helps your customers, too. It educates the customer about the products that you sell. If you know that one product needs another product in order to perform properly, why wouldn't you share that information with the customer while he or she is still in the store?

Suggestive selling also saves the customer time and aggravation. Georganne remembers a late night trip to the toy store one Christmas Eve. Later that night, when she began wrapping the gifts, she realized that almost every one of them needed batteries. And now the toy store was closed. Had the cashier suggested batteries to Georganne in the first place she would not have had to make a trip to the 24 hour convenience store to buy them. And she would have had a better perception in her mind about that toy store.

So how can you use suggestive selling to your advantage? Here are some easy to implement tips to start you on the pathway to profit:

- Schedule a store meeting that is completely devoted to suggestive selling. Explain how it works: You sell the customer the primary item, then add on additional items that complements it the original item. Don't; stop until the customer says no.

Encourage everyone to give it a try. You may even want to insert your own sales figures into our example to demonstrate why suggestive selling is so important. Remind them that everyone wins when the store is doing well.

At your meeting, hold up an item and ask your associates to shout out additional items that could be sold along with it. You will be amazed at how many combinations they will come up with! If you happen to come

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across an odd item that you just cannot add-on to, encourage your associates to suggest whatever item is on special that day.

From this point on, set aside 10 minutes at each store meeting for a suggestive selling exercise. Your associates will rise to the occasion, and they will gain confidence – the main ingredient in selling.

- Choose an "Item of the Day" and have every associate carry one around with them, talking to the customers about the item. We did this experiment not too long ago while setting a display of stuffed animals. Once the customers held them in their hands they were hooked.
- Encourage every associate to spend time reading product labels, especially the labels on products they are not familiar with. Vendors put all kinds of information on their labels because they know that in some stores the product will have to sell itself. A strong knowledge of the product you sell is just good service. It shows customers that your associates know their stuff. If every associate spent just 10 minutes per shift reading product labels, you'd have a store full of product knowledge geniuses within 30 days.
- Make sure that every associate has tried each of the items that your store sells. There is nothing worse than asking about a particular product, only to hear the associate say, "I don't know. I never tried it." Then what are you doing working at a store that sells interactive products?!"
- An easy way to add on to the sale is to practice a little sales trick called "Bundling." Bundling is simply packaging related products and/or services together into one package. And since consumers have been taught to believe that package deals are a better value than if the items were purchased separately, it works in your favor.

You might, for example, bundle a kids craft kit, extra components, and a class together. (We like adding the class in the bundle because it encourages the customer to come back and shop again.) Bundling creates add-on

sales even when the customer is shopping without the aid of a store associate. Ask your associates to suggest items that could be bundled together to increase sales. Then display your bundles on a table or end feature in a prominent location in your store. Keep it fresh: change the display as the bundles sell down, or at least every other week.

- Choose an item of the day and display it prominently at each checkout counter. You can get creative here, too: "Buy one, get one at half off," "5 items for \$5," or a special price that's just for the day are three good examples.
- Give your people incentives for using suggestive selling. Give them daily quotas and keep track at the cash register. Choose your own incentives or drop us an e-mail and we'll send you a list incentives that were suggested by retail sales associates.
- And don't forget to include your cashiers in your incentive program! Cashiers can be the biggest suggestive sales people in the store because they see every item the customer has in his / her cart or basket. What a perfect opportunity to add on to the sale. It's also a good idea to keep a small supply of your most popular add-on items at each checkout counter.

Suggestive selling should be right at the top of your Things To Do Right Now list. What are you waiting for? All it takes is focus and a little elbow grease. There's big money out there just waiting for you to pick it up. And you don't have to spend a single cent to get it!

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*Rich Kizer and Georganne Bender are retail anthropologists. They stalk and study that most elusive of mammals – the retail consumer. 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.*