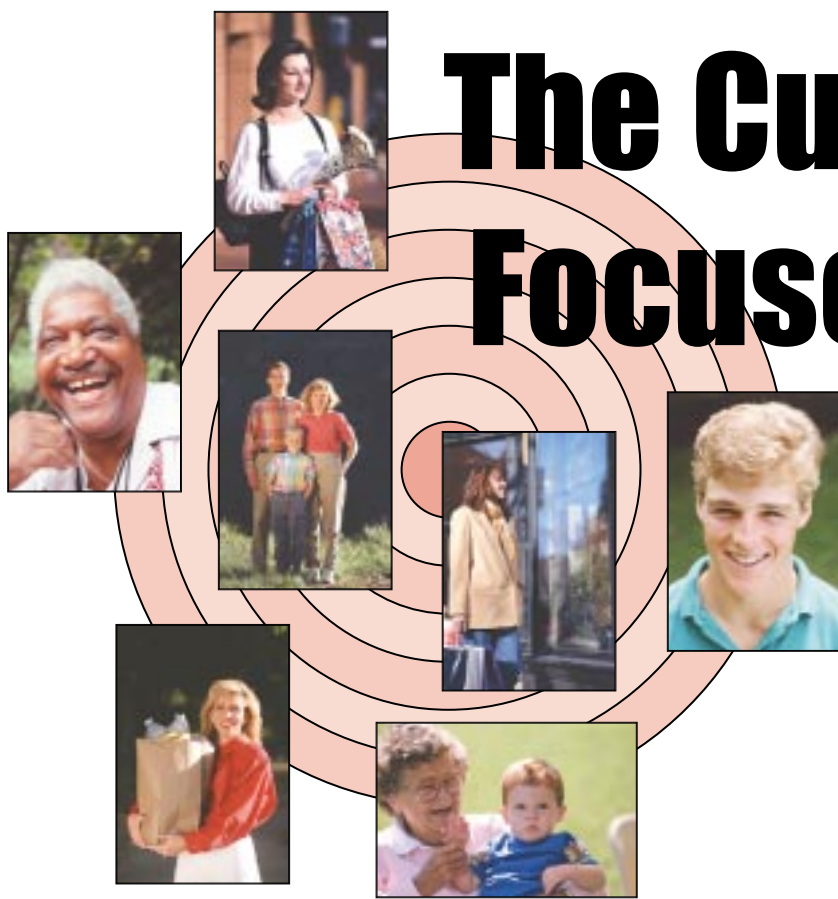


The Customer-Focused Store

By Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender

What makes customers choose one store over another? Our own Kizer & Bender set out to find the facts.



We are always asked what we think the perfect craft store would look like. That's a tough question to answer because so much in store design and display is subjective. Writing about what to put where and how to accessorize your store for success seemed like a good idea, but you've likely read hundreds of articles like that, and you will probably read a hundred more.

Instead, we decided to ask customers what they would like to see in stores. When their answers were coupled with research of our own, that question of subjectivity became a science.

Understanding customers and how they think is our specialty. We stalk customers. We watch and listen and ask questions to discover what motivates them to choose one store over another. And we study what retailers do well and where they slip up. Our goal is to find ways retailers can improve their stores and capture more customers.

And we've seen **The Good**: Stores that thrive; **The Bad**: Stores that falter; and **The Ugly**: Stores that just don't care what their customers think.

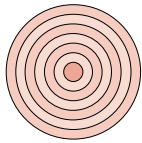
So we set out to discover what makes customers choose one store over another. We began with a visit to a beautiful, brand-new, big-box craft store. We planted ourselves in the

store's decompression zone – those first 10 to 15 feet inside the front door designed to slow customers down, and completely focus their attention on the store and what it offers.

This space is crucial because it's what customers see in the critical first 10 seconds inside the store; critical because this is where customers' perceptions are formed. The perception here was chaos – the store's decompression zone was full of "stuff."

Carts, piles of circulars, racks of class sign-up sheets, temporary vendor displays overflowing with product, good-luck plants, floral arrangements, and balloons – we really couldn't tell what the store looked like just by walking inside. All that stuff created nothing more than a bottleneck of customers desperately trying to get inside and enjoy the rest of the store.

Customers who were willing to wade through the clutter at the front door found a store full of wonderful things, but the confusion in the decompression zone had a negative effect on the customers' perceptions. This beautiful and expensive store might be a fun place to shop, but not until someone cleans up the act. There is tremendous value in stepping outside of your comfort zone and seeing your store as your customers see it.



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"If my husband isn't hassling me with, 'Can we go now?' every five minutes, then I can stay longer and do some serious shopping in peace."

"I LIVE IN NEW YORK; ENOUGH WITH THE CACTUS AND KOCHINAS!"

There's a lot to be said for regional merchandising. If your store is on the east coast, then your customers' tastes are going to be different from those in the southwest.

It's important to understand these differences and merchandise your store accordingly. You'll need to do the research by checking out books, magazines, and television shows on crafting and home decor.

And you'll need to constantly visit model homes, go on house tours, and visit craft fairs to keep up to speed on the tastes of your area. You'll also want to go straight to the source and spend time with suppliers, designers, interior decorators, and customers. Set up advisory boards for each group.

The purpose of an advisory board is to help you improve service and sales by making it easy to do business

with your store. Another is to find out what's on customers' minds, what's new, and what they desire. You'll want to invite four people to sit on each board. Meet quarterly outside the store, at the restaurant of your choice. The object is to ask questions – lots of questions.

W.Y.S.I.W.Y.G!

WYSIWYG – "What you see is what you get" – is the best way we can describe what customers want when it comes to visual merchandising and store displays.

Customers can pick up any number of magazines for design ideas; they can surf the Internet, and they can turn on just about any television channel and see a craft or home-improvement show. This makes it necessary for retailers to create realistic "Lifestyle" displays.

Lifestyle displays involve vignettes and actual room set-ups. A child's bedroom display, for example, features everything you'd expect, including the bed, end tables, and all the accessories that help make the room a special

place. You probably don't sell beds in your craft store, but you're going to need one as an accessory to the pillows you do sell. Props, Martha, are a good thing.

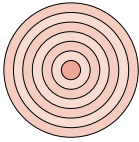
Another plus is that lifestyle displays encourage customers to interact with the product. They make it easy for customers to visualize how the items will look in their homes. And given all the shopping choices customers have today, why not give them the ultimate lifestyle experience in your store?

Street Savvy™ Strategy: When you see product that you carry featured in a magazine, tear off the cover and put it in a sign holder. Add the words "As seen in" and the title of the magazine; "As seen in *Better Homes and Gardens Magazine*." Place it in your lifestyle display. You'll gain instant credibility.

I NEED SPACE!

We held a focus group with women who had recently undertaken new projects; everything from completely updating a living room to creating a

(more on page 112)



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scrapbook for a Sweet 66 party! Here's what they had to say:

“I'd like to work with a professional who has done this before, someone to help me plan what I need to do. I'd also appreciate a place, even if it's just a comfy chair, where I can sit quietly and think my project through.”

“Something for the kids, perhaps just a coloring book, but something to occupy them while I'm trying to think.”

“If I happen to have my husband in tow, I'd like a comfortable place for him to sit and wait. If my husband isn't hassling me with, ‘Can we go now?’ every five minutes, then I can stay longer and do some serious shopping in peace.”

“An idea center where ideas can be explored, a place that houses a library of magazines and videos on various crafting and decor subjects.”

Street Savvy™ Strategy: Create an **Idea Center**. Take pictures of customers with their projects and place them in photo albums. Encourage customers to bring in photos of their own and add them to your books. Customers can browse your Idea Center for inspiration and ideas at their leisure.

WATCHING CUSTOMERS FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Walt Disney knew that if Disneyland appealed to children – his core customers – it would be a success. We all know that he was absolutely right. That's why we constantly look at businesses from the customer's point of view. You should, too.

Focus on your own store, and how it is perceived. Watch how customers

enter. Take a hard look at what they see first. What captures their attention? What stops them. What hassles them? If we asked you this question could you answer it in 10 seconds or less?

Make a list of these things, but don't stop there. Be a customer in each department, too. Grab a cart and go through all the steps customers go through. Is the experience easy? Was it enjoyable? If it isn't, change things so it is.

With the same criteria in mind, head out to your competitors' stores. Write down everything you feel, see and sense. When you return to your own store, stop at your front door and look around. What changes need to be made? Make them now.

Street Savvy™ Strategy: Get on your competition's mailing list, sign up for their clubs, attend their classes, etc. You'll learn about what they have to offer at the same time customers do, and you'll be able to react more quickly when necessary.

HOW TO TURN A CUSTOMER'S DREAM PROJECT INTO REPEAT BUSINESS

We met a retailer who said, “I do more repeat business than any of my competitors. Guaranteed.”

We thought she might be stretching the truth just a little bit until she explained the relationship-building strategy she'd implemented in her store.

She showed us her book, called “**Someday, I'd Love To ...**” It was filled with projects customers had plans to do, but for whatever reason

hadn't done yet. Compiling this book sounded like a lot of work until she explained that customers did the work for her. Each time a customer makes a purchase, they are given a “Someday, I'd Love To ...” form that lists different projects to check off, plus space to write in others.

Just like you, the retailer stays in touch with her customers through her quarterly newsletter, but she keeps the “Someday, I'd Love to ...” customers on a special list.

Several times a year, she sends these customers a postcard to remind them of the things they'd love to do. The card always includes a special offer, and customers respond like crazy. The time it takes to implement this program pales when compared to the increased business she does.

Street Savvy™ Strategy: This idea is perfect for your store. Create your own “Someday I'd Love To ...” program or e-mail us at info@KIZERandBENDER.com and we'll send you a template. Then commit to writing just five post cards a day and watch your repeat business build.

LISTEN UP!

Set aside time each week to talk with your customers, and then listen to what they tell you. Watch how they maneuver their carts through your store. Check out how they interact with your displays. When you find areas that need improvement, make those improvements. If you keep the customer's perspective in all that you do, then your store will be the first one they think of. What have you got to lose – except happy customers and increased sales? ♦

NOTE: Kizer & Bender will be featured speakers during the ACCI show in July. Hear them on the show floor and schedule a special one-on-one consultation in the *Crafttrends* booth. Watch for more information at www.crafttrends.com.