

LAGNIAPPES

The Independent Retailer's Secret Weapon

by Rich Kizer and Georganne Bender



Our friends, Dan and Wayne Boudreaux, affectionately known as “Stomper” and “Hot Dog,” are retailers from the great state of Louisiana. Stomper and Hot Dog have taught us quite a few things over the years. One of the best is a lagniappe.

The word lagniappe – pronounced “lan-YAP” – comes from the 19th century Cajun French word “la napa” which means “the gift.” Its original meaning was a small gift, or token of appreciation, that was given to loyal customers by New Orleans merchants. The meaning isn’t that much different today.

© KIZER & BENDER 2005. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
Retail anthropologists Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender were recently named as two of the Retail Industry's Most Influential People. They are nationally recognized experts on customer diversity, “messaging with the media”, marketing & promotion, and everything retail. They've been featured on ABC National News; their client list reads like a Who's Who in American business, and you'll find their award winning articles monthly in a variety of business and trade publications. Their popular column, “Georganne & Rich on the Road”, which appears monthly in Craftrends Magazine, won the American Society of Business Publication Editors (ASBPE) Award of Excellence in 2004. Contact Rich & Georganne at 888-215-1839 or via their website at <http://www.KIZERandBENDER.com>

The Boudreauxs, who own several stores not too far from New Orleans, have treated us to many a lagniappe over the years, but our favorite was a crawfish boil at their home where they taught us Midwesterners how to eat crawfish like a pro. They also gave Rich a Louisiana Parish cook book that he cherishes. He's been cooking up a storm ever since, although the meals he concocts are so fragrant that his wife makes him cook in the backyard. This is a good thing, however, because the aroma attracts the neighbors and a party always ensues. The Boudreauxs would be proud.

Those early New Orleans merchants had the right idea. As an independent retailer you can turn on a dime to connect with customers. You make a decision and the board of directors just met. Chain store and big box managers can only dream about having your kind of freedom. (cont. on page 426)



(cont. from page 425)

So it's the lagniappes, the unexpected little things, that set you apart from the competition. In our travels we've encountered many. Here are some of our favorites:

YOUR OWN PERSONAL SHOPPER

Many stores now offer customers personal shopping services - it's like having your own personal assistant! All you have to do is telephone the store, tell your personal shopper what you are looking for, and he or she handles the rest. Want to come at 2 p.m. to peruse art work to match your new décor? Easy. Need candles and accessories to finish your living room? No problem, your personal shopper has it under control. This easy-to-implement lagniappe would be a great sales-builder for your time-starved and stressed-out customers.

WHO SAID GETTING A ROOT CANAL WAS A BAD THING?

Your dentist might be a very nice person, but he's smart enough to know that you would avoid his services if you could. That's why dentists across the country are now offering free spa treatments along with your root canal. Yep, in some dental offices clients can receive massages, manicures and even pedicures. You leave relaxed, with clean teeth, and with a fresh coat of nail polish.

This is a perfect idea to spice up a Ladies Night Open House. Greet the ladies at the door in tuxedos. Ask the high school football team to valet park cars (in full uniform - they keep the tips.) Plan a night of product demonstrations, how-to and home decor seminars, food (maybe catered with a choice of entrees), contests, prizes and shopping. Why not cross promote with a local spa and throw in a manicure and pedicure? Think of the publicity this event will bring.

LAGNIAPPES APLENTY AT GEORGIA RESTAURANTS

Wisconsin retailers, Marsha and Marty Kapchinski, tell of several unexpected gifts while in Atlanta. One evening Marsha and Marty dined at The Capital Grill. Marty noticed that the waitress had removed their white napkins and replaced them with black ones. Curious, he asked why.

"Because you are both wearing black slacks and I don't want you to leave with white lint on them." Lagniappe? You bet.

Marsha asked for a lemonade. The waitress said that they didn't offer lemonade, but she would be happy to make her one. Marsha said no, an iced tea would be fine, but the waitress insisted. "It would be my pleasure," she said. Would your staff go out of their way to do the equivalent of making a customer a lemonade?

WELCOME TO THE BREAKERS!

While speaking at a conference this year, we were lucky enough to stay at the historic Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Fla.

When we pulled up to the hotel entrance, we were greeted by a gentleman in a golf cart, who introduced himself, welcomed us to The Breakers, and summoned a bellman.

When we walked into the lobby, we were met by the desk clerk who said, "Mrs. Bender! Mr. Kizer! Welcome to The Breakers! We're so glad you are here!"

Now, how did he know our names? Easy! The gentleman on the golf cart radioed the front desk, described us, and told the desk clerk our names. We felt like a million bucks. You would, too.

Are customers addressed by name in your store? Do associates offer their hand and introduce themselves to new customers? Make it a goal for everyone in the store to personally introduce themselves to at least five new customers a day.

"IT WOULD BE MY PLEASURE."

Request something at a Ritz Carlton Hotel, and you'll hear, "It would be my pleasure." It sure beats the monotone "Yeah" we usually hear at other hotels. The Ritz Carlton is known for its Empowerment Program. If a guest asks a Ritz Carlton Lady or Gentleman (that's Ritz speak for hotel associates) for something, he or she "owns" it until the guest is satisfied. Every, single person, from the general manager to the maid who cleans your room, is authorized to spend up to \$2,000 to make a guest happy. Are your associates empowered to take care of customer requests or do they have to ask your permission first? Trust them to do the right thing. Explain your empowerment guidelines, and they'll do you proud.

Our favorite Ritz Carlton lagniappe is what the Ritz Ladies and Gentlemen do when they meet a guest in a hallway: they smile, say hello, and move to the side to allow the guest to pass. Having been run over by cleaning carts in more than one hotel, you can see why we like this unexpected extra. We also like the Ritz motto: "We are ladies and gentlemen, serving ladies and gentlemen."

Do your associates stop what they are doing to address customers' who cross their path? Do they treat each customer with respect and dignity?

We could fill pages sharing the lagniappes we've received in our 15 years of travel together. We're grateful for each one of those unexpected gifts. Drop us an e-mail, and we'll send you even more ideas to help make your customers feel at home.

We also recommend that you give each associate a copy of this article, then hold a brainstorming session to create a list of lagniappes you can provide in your own store. Customers will reward your effort, and your competition will wonder why their customers are flocking to your door. |

SPECIAL NOTE:

The Boudreauxs and their stores survived the hurricanes and are doing fine. They are back to serving their customers and serving up crawfish to friends. Nothing can keep a good retailer down.



Learn from leading business consultants specializing in the retail industry at the only strategically structured educational program of its kind.

Choose from three areas of learning:

- Retail Business Basics
 - Buying & Selling
 - Building Your Brand
- Attain your AMERICASMART® MBA (Mastering Business Aptitude) by successfully completing curriculum requirements.

Complete information is available in your Atlanta Buyer's Guide.

