



Georganne & Rich — On The Road

BY RICH KIZER & GEORGANNE BENDER

Promotion Commotion

How you can create a beneficial frenzy in your store

We have traditions we adhere to when we travel. Or maybe they're just habits. Whatever you call them, one of those traditions is to have dinner at The Forum Shops at Caesar's Palace each time we visit Las Vegas. We like to choose a restaurant with an "outside" seating area, so we can watch what's going on in the mall. After dinner, we walk around and check out the stores.

The last time we were there we noticed a crowd gathering in front of the Abercrombie & Fitch clothing store. Gathering crowds are usually a good thing — it means something cool is going on inside. Notice that we said "usually."

Abercrombie & Fitch is known for its "magalog" — a combination of magazine and catalog that's geared to teens and college-aged kids. Old people like us are generally offended by the articles and the photos of young models shown in various stages of dress — or should we say undress — so we really weren't too surprised at what was attracting the crowd.

Standing just inside the door we met Abercrombie's greeters: A boy and a girl dressed in pajamas. Well, parts of pajamas. The boy was wearing only the pajama bottoms, and the girl was dressed in just the pajama top. We had heard that greeters like these two had caused commotions in malls across the United States this past holiday season, but we hadn't actually seen them for ourselves. We wish we hadn't.

Now, we all know what the guy in the pajama bottoms and the girl in the

pajama top were supposed to represent, and we're sure that's why Abercrombie had them stationed at the front of the store. The sad thing is that the young female model had no idea what her attire represented. When asked by one woman, she replied, "It's just a fun thing to do." Shoppers didn't think it was a fun thing

**"IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO CAUSE
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OF YOUR OWN."**

to do, and more than a few of them were vocal about it. Even in Sin City there's a limit to what's considered fun.

You might read that story and think we're stretching this causing commotions thing just a little. After all, you're not likely to stick half-dressed sales associates out in front of your store. But you might unwittingly put yourself in a situation that could have the same effect.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Consider the retailer who planned a big holiday open house in her 1,000-square-foot store. She thought she had carefully considered every detail — the right day; the four-hour time frame; the invitations; the demos that would draw a crowd; which vendors she could count on to

participate; the refreshments she'd serve; how the store would be decorated, etc.

She held several meetings with her staff to discuss exactly what would have to happen on the day of the event, when, and by whom. She planned everything, right down to the opportunity for one lucky customer to win a \$250 shopping spree — winner must be present to win. Then she sent out 2,700 invitations and hoped for a good turn out.

Did you catch that? 2,700 invitations and a "Winner must be present to win" Contest?

Good, now try and picture what 2,700 customers might look like in a 1,000-foot store. Even if half of them stayed home, that four-hour holiday open house would be a nightmare.

Actually it was bedlam. And, to put it mildly, customers were not happy. The retailer never recovered from the bad press.

GIVE & RECEIVE

You may have heard us tell the story of the retailer whose popular Annual Pumpkin Decorating Contest causes a good commotion each year, building both sales and positive word-of-mouth.

Each year this retailer gives away 100 pumpkins for children to decorate and bring back to the store to be judged by a popular vote. Each entry is numbered and carefully placed on display somewhere in the store.

You know what happens. Mom and

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Dad tell all of their friends and relatives to get down to the store and vote for little Suzie's pumpkin. The retailer knows what to do when all those friends and relatives arrive at her store – she sells them something while they are there. The store benefits from all of the foot traffic, and the child with the winning pumpkin receives a prize and their picture in the local paper. That same photograph hangs in the front of the store throughout the year, then it is moved to the Pumpkin Decorating Contest Hall of Fame.

The really cool thing is that although the retailer gives away 100 pumpkins, she usually gets more than 200 entries. It's become an eagerly anticipated, and much talked about, local tradition in her community.

This past October a retailer called to tell us that he was going to give away pumpkins in his own store. On the designated

pick-up day, he stacked 200 pumpkins in front of his store and opened for business. He caused a commotion all right – all morning long there was a steady flow of families choosing their free pumpkin – and clogging the space in front of the door so customers had to fight their way in.

“How was the contest?”, we asked. “What contest?” was the reply. I didn't have a contest. I just gave away 200 pumpkins and sales that day were flat.”

Really? Sales were flat? No kidding. The point of giving away pumpkins isn't to be nice; it's to build business.

And to cause a commotion. Like:

- Idler's Appliances in California. Idler's Annual Pie Baking Contest attracts over 100 entries each year.

- “Happy Bird Day” – a celebration of spring – at a Florida Ace Hardware store, where owner Dick Beal has been known to put on a giant bird suit and flag down

customers.

- Ladies Night, where a retailer in Washington treats female shoppers to a night long series of workshops, and the honor of having their cars valet parked by the local football team in full uniform. (All tips go to the team, and they make out like bandits!)

CAUSE A COMMOTION

If you are not already doing so, it's time for you to cause a few customer-pleasing, competition-miffing, promotional commotions of your own, just make sure that they are the sales-building kind. Brainstorm with your associates and vendors. Ask for commotion-causing ideas to make your events even better and ensure that you have covered every base. Turn the keepers into annual events your customers can't wait to attend. ♦