



Retail Resolutions For 2002

BY RICH KIZER & GEORGANNE BENDER

It's the end of the year. The "Golden Quarter." The final inning. January's just around the corner, and 2001's race is almost over. Then you can sit down and reflect on the year, maybe take a few days off to really think about 2002.

Snap out of it! In retailing there is no finish line! What you do right now will determine where 2002 will take you. If you're like a lot of us, you've already told yourself that next year you'll get organized. Next year, you'll become more focused. Next year, you'll try new and different things to grow your business. But before you know it, it's March and things at the store are pretty much the same as they've always been.

But not this year! This year the changes begin now, so stop what you're doing and take a break. Grab a cup of coffee, and pen and paper. Shut your door, turn off your phone, roll up your sleeves and meet your future. You can become one of those people who consistently achieve extraordinary results in both their business and personal lives.

1. Become the Infamous "Third Person"

Is there someone in the industry whom you really admire? Someone you've heard and read about; someone who is wildly successful? And yet, when you meet them face to face, one on one, you realize that they are no smarter, no more innovative, and no more talented than you are? What is it they do that puts them so far ahead of the pack?

The secret is that he or she is the "Third Person." It's been said that only one person in three uses his or her ability, brains, and talent to secure future success. Now, try to be inconspicuous, and quickly take a glance at the two people closest to you. They're obviously not the "one in three" so YOU must be the infamous "Third Person" – congratulations!

"Third Persons" literally shout success. They have the right attitude, they're determined, and most importantly, they know when to take action. They don't wait around, struggling over what to do and when to do it because they do it NOW.

It's a strange universal law, but those with a "Third Person" attitude just seem to have one success after another – their magnetism simply attracts good fortune. Now, don't be fooled into thinking that their real key to their success is luck, because it's not. Their success lies in their positive attitude and their ability to take positive action.

Here's how their success can come to you: Adopt a "Third Person" attitude, and that positive way of thinking will become a habit. Yep, just 21 days later, and that positive attitude becomes automatic. You'll be a whole new person, ready to accept and expect success.

2. Study Last Year's Performance

Take a look at where your business was at this time last year and where it is now. Do you like where it's going, or do you need to change the trend? What commitments did you make this year to grow your business? Which things worked for you? What





didn't? What will you need to change and focus on in 2002? Make a list – call it your “Strategic Plan of Action” – and refer to it all year long to keep yourself on track.

3. Get Inside Your Customers' Heads

Getting to know your customers this well involves quality time, but you'll learn so much, and besides, it's fun. Begin by “hanging out” with your fixtures to silently observe how customers navigate your sales floor. Tell your team that although you're in the store, they need to ignore you unless it's an emergency, then become invisible. With pen and paper in hand, position yourself out of sight, just inside the front door and wait. When customers enter, note what they do and where they go.

In just a few minutes, you'll see things you've never seen before. You'll find that customers don't always shop – and behave – they way you think they should. You'll begin to see shopping patterns that you hadn't noticed before. You'll overhear their comments about your store, and you'll see how they interact with your product, displays, and your associates. Watch and listen from different vantage points all over the store, and you'll come up with hundreds of new ideas to turn your sales floor into a selling machine.

4. Study Your Competition

You should be in your competitor's stores at least once every six weeks. Your goal is to learn everything you can about what their stores look like, and how they run their operations. You'll need to visit the competition as a retailer – you know, checking prices, store layout, displays, etc. – and as a customer.

Shopping as a retailer is the easy part because it's what you're used to. As a customer you need to, well, just be a customer. Is the store easy and fun to shop? How does customer service compare to yours? Note what happens when you enter and leave the store. Get on their mailing lists and attend their special events. Your ultimate goal is to find out what a typical customer experiences – then do it better.

5. Study Your Own Sales Floor

In the world of retail, there is no reality, only perception: you are what you are perceived to be by your customers, whether you like it or not. Oh, you may think that you have the best store in town, but their opinion is the only one that counts.

At least once a quarter, after you've been away from the store for a day or two, take this reality test: Begin at the front door of your store and write down everything that just doesn't look right; note anything that makes a negative impression.

Are last month's circus signs still hanging in the front window? Is that wonderful new craft item really being displayed in an old vendor rack? Do customers encounter something wonderful within the first 10 seconds they're in the store? Do this exercise throughout the entire store (yep, even in the bathroom!), then ask your newest store associate to do the same exercise. You'll probably fill two pages; she'll fill six.

Prioritize what needs to change and then make

(more on page 24)





the changes. Customers will reward your effort with their loyalty and your store's perceived reality will improve.

6. Punch Up Your Promotions

Your promotional plan in 2002 shouldn't just be a matter of running another ad, buying more radio time, or investing in a new television spot. This isn't about spending more money, it's about becoming Street Savvy – making your in-store events and promotions sizzle with excitement for your customers and your bottom line.

Have you planned exciting events for this month? What about the first quarter of 2002? Your new "Third Person" thinking will help you look – and work – outside the box to punch up your promotions.

New Year's Day and Super Bowl Sunday, for example, are great days to plan events for ladies to shop. Why not schedule an open house event with food, entertainment, demos, and door prizes. Advertising for events like this is cheap and easy – actually, just a bag stuffer away. Create your bag-stuffer invitation on an 8½"x11" sheet of paper and instruct cashiers to personally hand one to each customer, explaining the event, and inviting the customer to attend – and to bring friends. You'll impact customers who already know and love your store – and best of all, there's no cost of distribution!

You can add punch to your promotions by tapping into your associates. Hold a brainstorming session to stir up some ideas, then let each associate plan store promotions for a specific month. You won't believe the energy and enthusiasm you'll create! Let your associates elect an event team leader. Call that person "The Sultan of Sizzle" – the title of Sultan comes with the responsibility to come up with ideas that will add punch to your sales floor during these in-store events.



7. Strengthen Your Brand

If you asked customers what you're best known for, what would they say? More importantly, would they say anything at all? Does your store – your brand – mean anything in your marketplace? List your store's strengths, then decide how you can utilize them to strengthen and represent your brand. Choose your colors, logo, and maybe even a slogan, and use them everywhere.

Consistently build your brand by telling the same story in your advertising and promotional pieces, in-store signing and decor, on business cards and stationery. Even how your store associates look builds your brand, so make sure they represent you well. Through a consistent brand message, your store and your specialty will be highly recognizable and that's exactly what you want!

8. Strengthen Your Relationships

Keep a supply of blank note cards on hand and in the ready position. Your cards should represent your brand, so make sure they have your store name and address printed on them using your store's colors and logo.

Use these cards to send handwritten notes to four customers every day to simply thank them for their business. When you hear that a friend or colleague has done something exciting, drop them a note of congratulations. Telephone someone that has helped you somewhere along the line just to say hello. In other words, spend at least 10 minutes each day acknowledging the people who've helped make you a success.

9. Focus on the Little Things

It's a wonderful thing to have a store and to be able to do the things that you love every day, but it's important to remember that customers are the reason you are in business. Set aside time everyday to do something special for them: Offer hot coffee on a cold day or lemonade when it's 90 degrees outside. Send a flyer announcing new products or

(more on page 26)



your next in-store event. Create a newsletter that keeps them up-to-date on your latest adventures; you might even ask customers to contribute articles about your store and its merchandise. These seemingly little things make a big difference in where customers choose to shop – and with the thousands of choices they have today, why not help them choose your store?

10. Celebrate Your Associates

The one thing that drives us nuts is to hear a management-type refer to a store associate as a clerk. “Ask that clerk to get that for you.” The last time we checked, clerks were people in old movies who wear visors and sleeve protectors and sit at desks in cages, dispersing whatever. The people who work in your store are professional sales associates, and they deserve to be treated as professionals.

Where would you be without the people who work in your store? Think you could do it all alone? Your associates build value, relationships with customers, and they strengthen your brand, so this year, regularly celebrate your associates. Reward them with little things daily that reinforce their importance to your business. E-mail us for a list of low-cost and no-cost associate incentives. And remember, respect is free.

11. Continue Your Education

We eat and drink because our bodies need fuel to live, but most of us get too busy to continually feed our minds. At our seminars, at least one evaluation will always say, “I usually don’t have time to go to seminars. I didn’t even want to come today, I’m just too busy and besides, I already know how to run my store. But you reinforced important points, and I picked up ideas to increase sales. Thanks, I’m glad I came.”

Never stop learning! Read the magazines that pile up in the corner of your office. Take a course at your local community college. Go to the business seminars offered in your area and at the trade shows

you attend. HIA, ACCI, and Craftrends University (at MemoryTrends) all offer a great selection. If you miss a show or a class, you can still become a graduate student of Automotive University when you buy audio tapes of seminars and listen to them in your car. Continuing your education is an investment in yourself and your business.

12. Form a Network

And finally, look for opportunities to work with other people in your industry. Check with the associations you belong to, and join a group of others with businesses that are similar to yours. If a group doesn’t already exist, then form your own. Introduce yourself to new people at tradeshow. Ask your vendors to recommend other retailers you could network with. Network with vendors as well; they’re a great source of business advice.

Networking provides a wonderful opportunity to spend time with people who face the same challenges that you face. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to discuss product lines with a retailer who owns a store similar to yours in another town? Imagine the mistakes you might have avoided if you’d only been able to discuss your ideas and ambitions with someone who’d already been there. Networking will make you stronger.

So sometime this month, between the holiday parties, the in-store events (a lot of work but worth it), the returns, and customers frantically looking for the perfect gift 10 minutes before the store closes on Christmas Eve, find a few hours to review this article, to put on your Third Person persona, and guarantee your success in the coming year. And if you need encouragement to get started or a swift kick in the pants, we’re just an e-mail away. Here’s to you in 2002! ♦

© Kizer & Bender 2001 All rights reserved
Street Savvy™ is a registered trademark of
Kizer & Bender Speaking!

Note: Contact Rich & Georganne by e-mail at
info@kizerandbender.com

