



Retail Adventures in the Real World™

By RICH KIZER & GEORGANNE BENDER

What Makes You So Special?

Every business does something that makes it stand out from the rest. Sometimes management is aware of it, and sometimes they're not. And sometimes they make really stupid decisions about the things that make them unique.

Take Dunkin' Donuts for example. They recently announced that they will require all of their 5,300 locations in 32 countries to stop making their signature donut – the cool one with the handle that lets you dunk your donut in your coffee without burning your fingers. Apparently heat from competitors has caused them to rethink a few things, such as controlling and eliminating more costly procedures, so their namesake donut, the only one that was still made by hand, must go.

A few years ago, Victoria's Secret made a similar brilliant decision when it discontinued its signature fragrance, Victoria. We can't begin to understand why a company would drop a popular item that bears its own name. Hundreds of customers complained; customers who now pay outrageous amounts on eBay for a bottle.

Walking away from the things that make you special is just plain nuts. Disney could save money by not hiring someone to run around in a Mickey Mouse suit, but they never will. When companies walk away from things their customers love, they walk away from their brand equity.

The things that make your store special aren't always products. They can be the personal touches you bring to your business. The penultimate example of that comes from a floral delivery man.

As long as we've been business partners, Rich has spent Valentine's Day with his mother. And when he can't, he makes sure she receives a big bouquet of flowers. A few years ago a rescheduled speaking engagement found us in California on Valentine's Day, and Rich couldn't be with his mom. He had also forgotten to send flowers, and the three-hour time difference wasn't working in his favor.

He frantically called a florist and begged him to deliver flowers before the end of the day. It was important that Rich not break their tradition, especially because his mother had just moved into an assisted living residence.

The florist made no promises but took Rich's credit card number anyway. He also asked for Rich's e-mail address. By the time we were finished with our seminar, the florist shop was closed, and it was too late to call his mom, so Rich decided to check his e-mail. One of the messages was from the floral delivery man.

The letter said: "Dear Mr. Kizer: I was able to get flowers to your mother for Valentine's Day after all. I delivered them around dinner time and found your mom sitting with her friends. When I came in carrying your bouquet of flowers and

balloons, I heard her say, 'Those are for me! They're from my son, Richard!' You should have seen her face! Actually, you can see her face if you just click here."

Rich clicked on the download and a picture of his smiling mother, her arms filled with flowers, filled the screen. A simple photo taken with a digital camera and a simple gesture created a customer for life.

So, here's our challenge to you – grab paper and pencil, and write down at least three things you do that make it special for customers to shop in your store. Now list why these things are special.

Your list is proof that the things that make you unique don't have to cost a lot of money. Maybe it's the way you answer the telephone that always makes even the saddest caller smile. Maybe it's the handmade stickered and stamped cards you send to customers. Maybe it's the classes you continue to offer even though the big guy down the street stopped doing them years ago.

Perhaps it's the steaming cups of coffee you offer customers on cold winter days and the ice cold lemonade you always have in the summer; or the wonderful way you wrap each gift; or the extra special service you give even when the customer is only buying a 25¢ sticker.

In a world of "me, too" retailers, these are the things that pull customers closer. Your signature touches are what keep them there. ♦

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