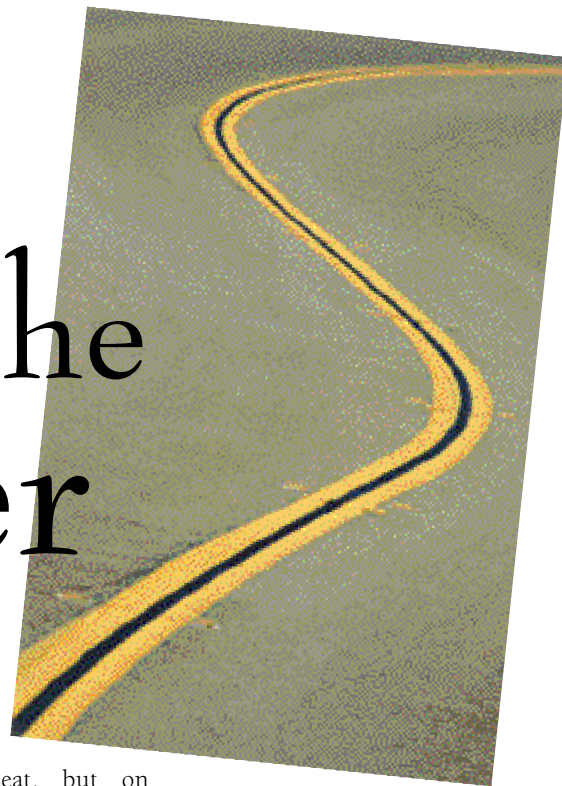




Why Did the Customer

BY RICH KIZER & GEORGANNE BENDER



FRESH, CHEWY,
BAKED-RIGHT-ON-
THE-PLANE
CHOCOLATE CHIP
COOKIES. TO
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MILWAUKEE.

Okay, so why did the customer cross the road? We hope you answered “To get to **my** store.” If you didn’t, it’s time to think about a few things, like why customers choose your store over your competitors’.

Face it, customers have tons of shopping choices today, and most stores sell pretty much the same things. It’s what you do in your store that sets you apart from the pack. What do you do that makes you different? What things do you do/offer/sell that make you special? Why should a customer cross the road to get to your store?

We know. It’s customer service. **Forget about it!** Every retailer says they give great service; you probably do, too. But think about this for a moment: Do you absolutely know for a fact that every single customer who crosses the road to come to your store will have a great service experience? Or will they be greeted by a glassy-eyed response of “It’s not my department” just like you were when that major, unnamed airline lost your luggage on the way to the HIA Show? We hope not. And we’re here to help make sure the experiences customers have in your store – those unique moments of truth that set you apart – consistently cause them to cross the road.

CREATING A “CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE” EXPERIENCE. Midwest Express Airlines hits the top of the customer service spectrum in our book. We drive from Chicago to Milwaukee just to fly them because they understand what’s important to their customers. Every airline gives you

a seat, but on Midwest Express, every seat is First Class: leather, cushy, and only two per row. (Georganne really appreciates this because she generally gets stuck in the middle seat, crammed in between Rich and some guy who has forgotten what soap is for.) Midwest Express also gives you real dishes, real silverware, and real food.

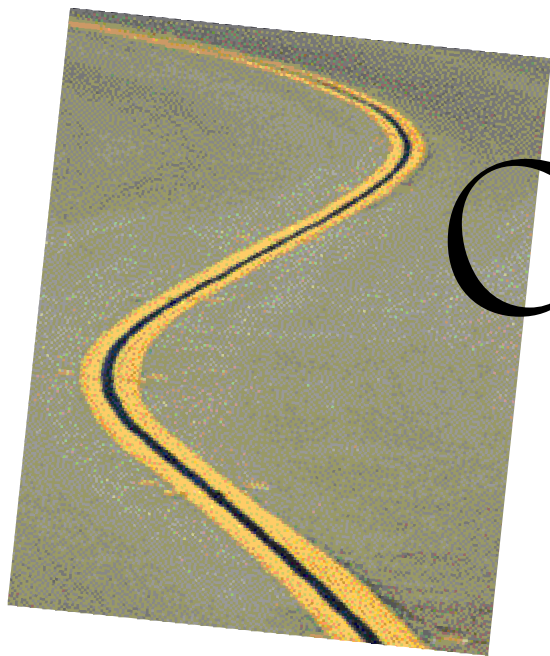
Rich likes all the little amenities Georganne likes, but he *loves* their chocolate chip cookies. That’s right, chocolate chip cookies. Fresh, chewy, baked-right-on-the-plane chocolate chip cookies. To Rich, this perk alone is worth the extra hour drive to Milwaukee.

We talk about Midwest Express and their chocolate chip cookies in every one of our seminars, so when another airline gave us baked-on-board chocolate chip cookies, we thought, “Cool, they’ve been to one of our keynote presentations!” until Rich asked the flight attendant why we were so lucky. She said, “Because there’s no one in First Class, and we can’t eat them all.” You can just imagine how special we felt.

Airlines are airlines, and stores are just stores until you decide to become Street Savvy™ and think differently than your competition, doing the unexpected. What kinds of “Chocolate Chip Cookie Experiences” do you do for your own customers?

Do you do the little things that make them feel at home in your store? Are they acknowledged – or





Cross the Road?



better yet – recognized, when they enter the store? Do you offer ideas and suggestions? Do you keep ahead of the trends? Are your displays inviting, or is the product sitting on shelves just like every other store? Do they stimulate sales? Do you demonstrate the product? Can customers return things hassle-free? Can they check their coats and packages? Can they get a free cup of coffee or a *chocolate chip cookie*? Shop your competition, and even non-competing stores, to look for ideas and then out-do them. Do things to stand out, and customers will come back for more.

CEMENTING CUSTOMERS. While traveling in the south, we found a Street Savvy retailer celebrating her grand re-opening. She'd been in business for more than 10 years, and the community knew and loved her store, but she wanted to give her next 10 years a jumpstart. She decided to begin her next decade at the crack of dawn, and she knew she'd need an incentive to entice customers to come out at 6 a.m. What to do? Deep price cuts? Free product? A brass band? Nope.

She offered a 5 percent discount *for life* to the first 100 customers who came to the store that morning.

They came out all right. They lined up around the building to become a part of that very elite, card-carrying group, so she graciously changed her promotion from the "first 100 customers" to the "first 150 customers" to accommodate those waiting on line. She said, "5 percent is not much of a discount on a regular-priced item, but it sure has created a lot of attention and customer enthusiasm." Then she added, smiling, "I might even let them will their lifetime discounts to their relatives!"

"CROSSING THE ROAD" CLASSES. You

hear about the importance of classes at every sales-building seminar you attend. We say, "Classes ... schmusses." Classes aren't new – plenty of retailers do them, and do them well, but we'd bet they don't do them like Marsha and Marty Kapchinski at M&M Farm & Home in Schofield, Wisconsin; a store that could only be described as a Ben Franklin Crafts, Ace Hardware, pet store, and more, all under one exciting green roof. Being intensely customer focused, and dyed-in-the-wool Street Savvy™ thinkers, Marsha and Marty do things most people would never think of doing.

By the end of the holiday season in 1999, they were exhausted from trimming their store, and were tired of hearing customers say, "Your store is decorated so beautifully, and your Christmas trees are perfect. I wish I could make my home look as good." Marsha thought, "You can, and we can teach you."

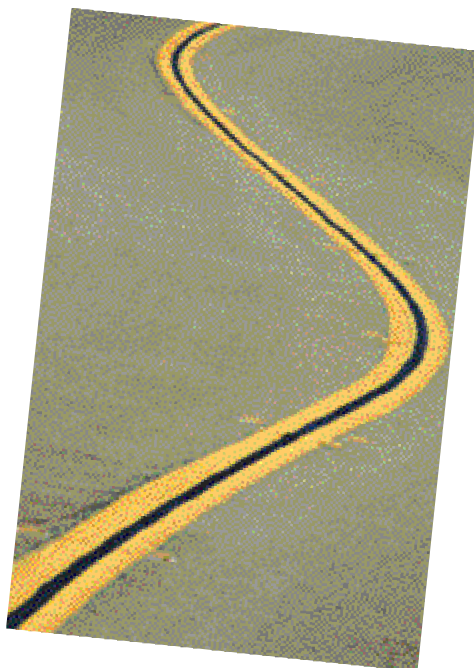
In October 2000, 12 customers attended a free, six-hour class and learned how to assemble, shape, light, and trim trees, as well as how to create a tabletop ceramic Christmas village. Attendees received a boxed lunch and a ceramic store to start their own home display. By the time the class was over, eight trees had been lighted and trimmed.

Imagine the customers' satisfaction at a job well done. Imagine how much they spent in the store, so they could recreate what they had done in their own

IMAGINE HOW MUCH THEY SPENT IN THE STORE BEFORE THEY LEFT SO THEY COULD RECREATE WHAT THEY HAD DONE IN THEIR OWN HOMES. IMAGINE THE NUMBER OF FRIENDS THEY TOLD TO STOP IN AND SEE THEIR HANDY WORK, AND IMAGINE GETTING YOUR STORE TRIMMED FOR CHRISTMAS – FOR FREE!



(more on page 104)



homes. Imagine the number of friends they told to stop in and see their handiwork, and imagine getting your store trimmed for Christmas – for free!

LIFETIME LOYALTY. Sometimes Street Savvy™ thinking takes you places you've never been before. Consider the retailer who decided to offer a lifetime guarantee on the craft paints he sold. This seemed a little extreme to us – until he explained.

SHE ALSO RECEIVES GREAT PUBLICITY BECAUSE HER SCHOLARSHIP IS AWARDED AT THE HIGH SCHOOL ON AWARDS NIGHT IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE FULL OF POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS.

History indicated that although he sold a lot of paints, he rarely had any returned. And besides, most problems usually arose within the first 30 days when he would have to fix the problem anyway, so he decided to go for the lifetime guarantee. He said, "Let's say a customer returns a bottle of craft paint after a year. I lose my 75-cent cost because I have to replace the paint. However, almost every customer will find something to buy in my store, even if they only came back to take advantage of the guarantee. If that customer spends just an additional \$10, my profit is \$5-\$5.50. Deduct the \$.75 for the paint, and I'm still making \$4.25-\$4.75. I might even get credit from the vendor for the defective paint. I don't lose, the customer is happy, and she's mine. She's not going to buy her paint anywhere else."

How many craft stores do you know that offer a lifetime guarantee on anything? Could you?

CREATE SCHOLARSHIPS. We spoke at a retail conference recently where we met a retailer who gives back to her community in a unique way. She told us that she was approached for charitable contributions

on a weekly basis. Sometimes she just couldn't contribute, and sometimes she felt her gift was not appreciated, so she decided to look for an alternative that would benefit her community and her store. And then an idea came to her: an annual scholarship awarded to a local high school student, fully funded through her craft classes. Here's how it works:

Attendees pay a class fee of \$5 for every class they attend, and that \$5 goes directly into the scholarship fund named for her store. Customers don't mind the fee because they know it goes toward a worthy cause – in fact, class attendance has gone up since she started her program. She also receives great publicity because her scholarship is awarded at the high school on awards night in front of an audience full of potential customers. Guess who else is there? The press.

YOUR IDEAS HERE. So what do you do that makes you special? Finish this article and call a brainstorming session with your staff. Look for ideas to make your store unique. Do something weird.

The Funky Munky, a very cool clothing store in Dundee, Illinois, has a bright yellow VW Beetle with its logo painted on the side – it's a rolling billboard! You could do that.

You could do this, too: Award the car to the first employee who submits a "crossing-the-road, business-building" idea to drive free for a week. Each week thereafter, award the car to the store associate who did an outstanding job working with customers. Let the associates vote for the lucky winner. You'll build staff loyalty, loads of fun, and create miles and miles of rolling ads!

And the next time we ask "Why did the customer cross the road?" You'll say with great enthusiasm, "To get to MY store!"

