

Clandestine Retailing: Creating New Customers

By Rich Kizer &
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Clandestine Retailing: doing things that attract new customers to your store without being seen by your competition until it's too late for them to react.



Would you like to increase your new customer count and foot traffic this year? Who wouldn't? Every retailer enjoys seeing new faces roaming the store aisles, looking at old product with fresh eyes, and exclamations like, "I need this and this and this!" are music to retailers' ears. This magic happens in stores across the country everyday, but it doesn't happen by accident. It happens because the owner of the store makes it happen. The days of running an ad and having customers flock to your store are all but over - today it takes more effort, elbow grease and desire to grow your business. There are potential customers walking by your store right now - the question is: what are you willing to do to entice them inside?

Years ago a friend of ours bought a Fast Sign franchise. He thought that his new career would be running the store.

He was wrong. He hired a manager to run the store; his job was to hit the pavement and find new business. In many ways that's your job. Attracting new customers is critical to every retailer's success. Here are some proven ideas that work for other retailers and can work for you, too.

Classes and Crops

We'll never forget the woman in a focus group who said that she was dying to make scrapbooks for her children, but was too afraid to come to a crop because she didn't want to look stupid in a class full of experts. We bet there are hundreds of potential customers in your community who feel the same way. It doesn't matter what the craft - you have to make it look easy and fun.

A simple tag line like "No Experience Necessary!" will

do the trick. Add this sentence to all your marketing efforts, including bag stuffers, your Web site, newsletters, e-mail blasts, monthly calendars, and hang a big sign in your front window.

Sometimes class names can be intimidating as well. A number of years ago a client of ours began naming classes “You can create”, “You can do”, and “You can build,” and class sign-ups increased.

Open House

Once a quarter host a “Get to Know Us” open house. Everyone is welcome, but the focus should be on new customers and those who’ve been crafting for less than a year. During this event you’ll want to greet your guests at the door, get them a nametag and refreshment, and then introduce them to the person who’ll be their hostess for the evening. (Hint: If you don’t have enough store associates to help at events, ask your best customers to help out. Pay them with a store gift certificate. You’ll be surprised at how many will volunteer – they’re proud to show off “their” store.)

Treat every guest to the following:

- **A grand tour of the store and the class/crop room.**

Have easy make-and-takes set up so customers can get their feet wet. This little success will go a long way in encouraging them to return.

- **A meet and greet with class instructors and fellow classmates.** Remember the first day of school? You always felt more comfortable when you knew someone before you got there. Ask some of your class regulars to man the classroom during your open house.

- **Make one wall in the class/crop room your “Wall of Fame.”** Let new crafters see others just like them at work. Post photos from previous open houses of classes/crops in action, attendees having fun and crafters showcasing their latest creations. Update your “Wall of Fame” frequently, and put the old photos in an album for customers to peruse at the store.

- **Give each new crafter open house attendee a 10 percent discount off of their next purchase.** Print or stamp this special gift from you on the back of your business card and make it good for 30 days.

Update Your Class and Crop Themes

One of the things our focus group participants said kept them from attending classes and crops was the name of the event. Are you using tired class names? Titles like “Crafting with Sarah” and “Valentine Layout with Mary” tell potential crafters what the class is about, but they

don’t sound very exciting. Pick a cool title and put the need-to-know basic information in the copy. Have an in-store contest to see who can come up with new titles that are sure to attract new crafters.



R.F.W.O.M

The time to work your word of mouth is when the store is full of shoppers. You know how it works: the customer tells two friends and they tell two friends and on and on.

We call it R.F.W.O.M. - Rapid Fire Word Of Mouth - and it works. In fact, a study by BIGresearch, a market intelligence firm that provides analysis of consumer behavior, ranked word-of-mouth as the number one reason new customers visit a store. Perfect! You want customers talking about your fabulous product, stellar customer service and thrilling in-store experience.

Collect Customer Testimonials

A customer testimonial is 10 – 20 times more powerful than what you have to say about yourself. So when a customer says something good about your store, write it down! You can use their quotes (first name and last initial only) in all of your marketing efforts and on in-store signing. Better yet, record those fantastic testimonials and post them on your Web site and on www.YouTube.com.

Have you heard of Claseo? The company bills itself as the world’s first closed-shopping online community, as purchases on the Web site can only be made by those who’ve been invited. Each member of Claseo is given a limited number of invitations to share with friends, who must enter an invitation code and make a purchase in order to become members themselves. It’s the desire for exclusivity that sells. You can do the same thing:

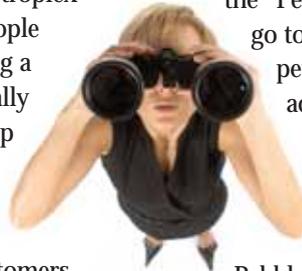
- **Start an exclusive club.** Let customers host private, invitation only classes at your store, as in “You’re invited (the customer’s name here) to a personal class/crop.” Give them the royal treatment in a mini-open house setting.
- **Our “Introducing My Friend” letter** lets customers invite their friends to your store. The lure is a hand-written note from the current customer, and a free offer (you decide) for the new customer. It’s like a gift from your best friend!
- **Give each of your best customers 15 Customer Referral Cards.** The one who has the most new customers come to the store wins a prize. The cards also entice new shoppers with the offer of a free gift when they visit the store. There’s a reason realtors and doctors rely on referral cards - they work.

(more on next page)

"You can attract new customers to your store, but it takes time and effort. Build time to go out FOR business into your monthly things-to-do list."

Clandestine Retailing has a lot of under-the-radar marketing potential for your store. Cat Beatty, owner of Cats Creations Scrapbooks & More in Mineral Wells, Texas, is a Clandestine Retailer. Cat watches the DFW metroplex Yahoo Group. She noticed that people were complaining about not having a good place to crop, so Cat personally e-mailed each member of the group and invited them to her store to shop and crop. She sweetened the pot with a free crop voucher. It worked! Some of these new customers drive two hours to get to Cat's store.

Signing up for Google Alerts can also help you uncover new customers while keeping an eye on your competition at the same time. Google Alerts is a free service that allows you to monitor anything on the Internet. Each time your chosen area of interest appears online, Google sends an alert right to your e-mail box. Sign-up at <http://www.google.com/alerts>



More ideas to attract new customers

- **Become a local celebrity.** Dene Van Winkle owns Imagine That Scrapbooks & Gifts in Roswell, New Mexico. Last year Dene created the "Pebbles" fundraiser in which all proceeds go to a local charity. Pebbles is the store's pet rock mascot that customers bid on to adopt, and the lucky bidder gets to keep Pebbles for an entire month. Pebbles has experienced daily life in Roswell and has been all over the country, staying at the finest properties.

Pebbles also attends all of the creative industry trade shows - she's a very well rounded rock. Stories about Pebbles have been in all of the local papers, and Dene has become a local celebrity.

- **Host home parties.** Pack up your wares and hit the road. Home parties work for all kinds of companies and they can work for you too. Get guests involved with easy product demos and make-and-takes. Bring product for sale - instant

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gratification - and take orders as well. Most home parties make you wait days for delivery; you can do it the next day. You can deliver purchases to the customer's home, or give them a VIP ticket that allows them to pick up their merchandise at your store. While they're at your store, they just might want to sign up for classes or pick up additional items.

- **Speak locally about the importance of crafting.**

Local organizations are always looking for interesting guest speakers. Your talk should be about the role crafting plays in our culture or on the importance of preserving memories. It can't be a blatant sales pitch, but wearing a shirt with your store name and logo on it will take care of that.

- **Host a Chamber of Commerce Mixer.** Our Chamber hosts four mixers per month and any member can host one. Mixers provide an opportunity to meet and mingle with other Chamber members and creates an opportunity to introduce members to your store.

- **Offer your class/crop room for meetings.** You get to welcome participants and maybe even do a demo before the meeting begins. Look for groups that need space during off-hours.

No empty hands!

When customers fall in love with your store, make sure they return to shop again. You need to create a weekly Bag Stuffer detailing something cool that's going on in your store that week. (Hint: Don't let the name fool you: Bag Stuffers should never be pre-stuffed into your bags. Instead, have associates place the Bag Stuffer in the customer's hand.) You should also build a Bag Sheet that lists all of the services and conveniences you offer customers. Bag Sheets make great Bag Stuffers.

So many ideas and so little space!

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but it takes time and effort. Build time to go out FOR business into your monthly things-to-do list. We guarantee it will be well worth your time. And if you want to brainstorm ideas specific to your store, give us a call!

Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender are nationally recognized experts on customer service, customer retention strategies, "messing with the media," and everything retail. Contact them by e-mail at info@kizerandbender.com. ©Kizer & Bender 2008. All rights reserved.

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