



# Going Out for Business

By Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender

**S**o, how are you doing these days? Things sure seem to be a lot tougher at retail this year than they were last year. According to Michael Niemira, chief economist with the International Council of Shopping Centers, personal income and personal consumption have been moving in lockstep over the past few months.

Yes, the cost of gas is rising every day, causing many people to drive only when absolutely necessary, even to the point of canceling the family summer vacation. There's a new term for that – "Staycation" – a vacation spent close to home.

**"A recent survey showed that the number one reason customers don't come back to shop with you again is because they forget."**

So if families are going to be traveling less, and staying closer to home, that means more customers are going to be looking for things to do this summer to keep themselves and their kids occupied. You, on the other hand, will be looking for new ways to increase sales this summer – what a perfect fit!

## Kids Summer Camp

This July and August Michaels will host an in-store Kids Summer Crafts Camp. Kids are divided by age group: sessions for 5 to 8-year olds are held daily from 9:30am–11:30am; and sessions for kids ages 9 to 12 are held daily from 1:30pm–3:30pm. Craft projects correspond with a daily theme: Tropical Day, Game Day, A Day at the Circus, and Bags & Butterflies are just a few of the fun things in store for this

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year's campers. You can learn more here: [http://www.michaels.com/art/online/static?page=store\\_camp07](http://www.michaels.com/art/online/static?page=store_camp07)

Color Me Mine in Summit, New Jersey, is hosting a Multi-media Full Day Summer Camp for Kids. Camp classes run from 10:00am to 2:00pm, Monday through Friday. In the morning, kids paint a ceramic piece; after lunch, there's another art project in a different medium: mobiles, print-making, sculpting, or painting on canvas.

## Expand Your Summer Line-up

Julie and Robin Cates own "On the Pot" Paint & Pottery Studio in Salina, Kansas. This summer they're expanding their kids and grown-ups parties (separate parties for each group), studio tours, and Ya-Ya Nights. They've added glass fusing to their store's line up, and Julie's fun, funky, and functional custom pieces are selling like hotcakes. Or hot Cates ... check it out here: <http://www.thatsfab.net/>

Start your own Summer Camp for Kids! Fill the days (or afternoons) with a variety of projects, including things that kids love, but are not necessarily sold in your store. If you're a scrapbook retailer, branch out, and let the kids embellish flip-flops or tie-dye T-shirts in addition to creating a "What I Did on My Summer Staycation" album.

## Bag-a-Craft

Make your own craft kits, bag 'em up, and take them to your local day care centers. Offer to teach a free craft project on the spot, or schedule it for a later date. In addition to a craft project to take home to Mommy, add a coupon good for a free class or a free day at your in-store summer camp.

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Bag-a-Craft is also a great idea for senior assisted living centers. Speaking of seniors, who incidentally are very social animals, take a cue from one of our local high schools and help organize a Senior Citizen Prom. The complimentary prom, with all the activities found at every senior prom, including tuxedos and ball gowns, was sponsored by the school's National Honor Society with help from local retailers. It was a big hit!

### Pop Culture Parties

Nicole Jones, owner of Sensual Steps Shoe Salon in Chicago, got the jump on her competition with a *Sex and the City* Listening Party held at her store. For just \$25, attendees walked the VIP carpet, noshed on hors d' oeuvres, sipped

point is that they stay in front of their customers, so customers don't forget about their stores.

A recent survey showed that the number one reason customers don't come back to shop with you again is because they forget. They're busy, time-starved, and stressed-out, so if another store that's similar to yours is on their way home, they stop and shop there. Start a regularly scheduled e-mail blast program and do it now.

### It's All About the Sizzle!

For each event you run this summer, appoint one associate the official "Sultan of Sizzle." The Sultan's job is to put the icing on the cake; the sizzle on the steak – to take your event from fun to fabulous. Give the Sultan a little cash and turn him loose; we don't care if its 50 bucks or 500 big ones – give him enough to light up the joint!

Here's the thing: Many retailers won't weather the current economic dilemma very well; some won't survive at all. But you will. Because you won't put off what needs to be done today until tomorrow. You won't wait to see what the guy down the street does before you make a move. You won't blame your mall or shopping center or downtown association for not doing enough to help you; and you won't sit on your hands hoping that things will take care of themselves. You'll survive, and maybe even thrive, because you decided to take action.

And one more thing: Call us if you need help. We're 100 percent approachable and we don't have a thing to sell. We just want you to be here when the economic dust settles! ■

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Cosmopolitans, enjoyed complimentary spa services, and more. The soiree at the store was followed up by a pre-screening of the movie at a Chicago theater – a full day ahead of the film's national release.

There are many new films coming your way this summer. Find out what's unique about each one, and host a Pop Culture Party in your store. Stop by a newsstand and pick up a copy of *Entertainment Weekly* magazine for the scoop on all the hot, new summer films.

### A constant drip of water ...

A few times a month Cat Beaty, owner of Cat's Creations Scrapbooks in Mineral Wells, Texas, Bob and Shirley Ferguson, owners of Ben Franklin Crafts & Frames in Redmond, Washington, and Dene Van Winkle, owner of Imagine That! Scrapbooks & Gifts in Roswell, New Mexico, send us e-mail blasts outlining something that's going on in their stores. The