



indie bookstore entrepreneur

Summer 2009



Next workshop

Opening A Bookstore: The Business Essentials

Sept. 14-20, 2009
Amelia Island
Florida

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What a great bookstore!

From store design
and marketing
to coaching during
your first year and business
valuations, we're here to
help your business become
even more successful.

Summer is a season of amazing energy. Foods we love are ripe for the picking. The days are longer. Vacations beckon - a time to get away and return refreshed and renewed.

Seasons are a reminder that there are times to rest and times to grow. New ideas sometimes silently emerge as we go about our daily routines. When we allow them to percolate and take form, we can magically be stirred into action. This is the entrepreneur's creative process: always rewarding, and often unstoppable.

language of love.



There's a store we regularly visit in our hometown, but cringe every time we see the sign on the front door that reads "No public restroom!" with exclamation point and all.

That's why it's always refreshing to come across an adorable little display like the one pictured here. Perched at the entrance to the store, the little blackboard simply reads:

WELCOME
Food & Drink
Animals
People

The presentation is simple, friendly and unpretentious ... it's so unchain-like. While we may be tempted by one bad incident to craft a new policy and post a sign, is that really the tone you want to set for *every* customer who comes through your door?

We're in the business of words. What words are used outside and around your bookstore? Take a closer look at all of your signs as



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you are in various parts of the store.

If your goal is to offer comfort and relaxation to customers you consider friends and guests, check to make sure you're conveying the right messages ... and using the right language to do so.

notice your language.

be mindful.

local partnerships.



What booklover isn't on a constant quest for more bookcases? Where do your customers go if they want some built-in bookcases for their home or office?

Most communities have an independent cabinet-maker that may have rented construction space, but not a showroom. Why not offer to be their showroom to show off some of their best work?

It's a win/win *local* partnership:

- You have beautiful new fixtures in a focal point area in your store and perhaps can negotiate a commission on every sale of custom work that you refer
- Your wood-worker has a showroom that is open long retail hours where potential clients can see the craftsmanship for themselves and pick up a business card and maybe a brochure

local partnerships await.

artisans are welcome, too.

While browsing a local summer arts and crafts festival, we were reminded of all of the local talent ... painters, wood-workers, artisans ... with so much to share.

Might someone in your area be open to (and grateful for) a collaborative partnership with you? From building decorative bookcases for a child's bedroom (what a great new baby gift for grandparents to give!) to framed art for high spaces above bookcases, you can offer some unique pieces your customers



won't find elsewhere - and you're supporting your local creative community.

You can see lots of fun examples of furniture items for children at AllChildrensFurniture.com (above) and RosenberryRooms.com.

rethink it.



When was the last time our industry took a good look at how we group our merchandise? For years, even decades, we've used traditional section names to arrange our selections. "*Self-Help*" is so '70s. So is "*Women's Studies*". Our lives have changed, our customers' needs have changed. It's time to rethink those section signs and come up with language that customers can readily relate to.

We particularly feel sorry for the books in "*Reference*", one of the least sexy section names out there. Turns are pretty pathetic in most stores. But maybe there's some potential ...

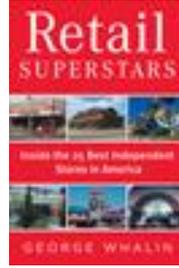
Take a look at some of the upcoming releases like *1,001 Things They Won't Tell You: An Insider's Guide to Spending, Saving, and Living Wisely*. Wouldn't it do much better on a shelf with other "**Dollars and Sense**" books? In the kids department, *Way to Be!*, a picture book about manners, would likely exceed two turns a year if it's not spine-out in "*Kids Reference*". How about a shelf label that reads something like, "**Mind Your Manners**" instead?

Books on creativity, careers, writing, and genealogy are all sub-categories that can get lost in "*Reference*". Wouldn't section signs like "**The Write Stuff**" or "**Re-invent Yourself**" attract more attention? Sounds like a fun project for the entire staff. Put them on the beat, then discuss the new categories and strategies at your next staff meeting.

From large section signs to mini shelf-labels, there's so much room for innovation when you think in terms of answering the customer's silent question, "*What's in it for me?*"

**create some fun.
update. innovate.**

**enduring indies.
common wisdom.**



For weeks, we've been reading the National Retail Federation's daily email with news about how the national chains are responding to the struggling economy. It seems that most are now racing to add "value" merchandise, lines that have lower price points, but decent margins. When Wall Street demands short-term profit, there's always pressure to "do something". And that's not always good for the long-term success of the business.

But that's not the dynamic within tenured independent retailers in tough times. Just flip through some of the stories in George Whalin's *Retail Superstars: Inside the 25 Best Independent Stores in America* (\$26.95, Portfolio, 978-1-59184-260-6) and you'll see what some of these retail leaders have in common. Some have stayed in business for generations and succeeded despite all kinds of challenges. Here's the wisdom we see in reading their stories:

- A commitment to quality merchandise - or unique items that can't be found anywhere else - is an important competitive advantage
- Quality service is never something to sacrifice
- Owners who are visible and active within their communities are repaid with valuable friendships, partnerships, business, and a satisfying life
- Quirky and even fiercely outrageous store designs (and owners) are noteworthy because they're decidedly "unchained"
- Customers are the source of ideas that prompt internal changes and that's what drives growth; listen to your customers and you'll know your next steps

Though all but two of the indie stores profiled are very large scale, Whalin has chosen some gems. It'll spark some ideas, support your own work as an indie entrepreneur, and put you in good company with kindred spirits. Congratulations to Powell's City of Books for being one of the 25 chosen!

**strengthen what you do best.
stretch in a new way.**

Look for Donna's "Soapbox" opinion piece to appear in *Publishers Weekly* sometime in July. It's all about marketing partnerships between publishers and booksellers with strategies that are mindful of the common goal of increasing sell-through.

Instead of racing through the store this week, take a slower walk from back to front and front to back. Look around with fresh eyes, as if you're seeing things for the first time. Identify some possibilities ... and keep learning!

Mark & Donna Paz Kaufman
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