

Right Products. Right Prices. Wrong Location.

Facing the Challenges of a Bad Store Location Head On

By Nicole Leinbach Reyhle

The old saying goes that there is no point in dwelling on the past. And in the case of choosing a storefront that has *not* proven to be the right location for your business, this is – unfortunately – the best way to actually handle the situation. Sure, you could point fingers and blame someone else for swearing your current storefront would have been a hit or desperately beat yourself up for not picking your second choice as your first... but this won't get you anywhere. Instead, let's look at the reality of your store, its location and how to find success in sales despite the not so great street address.

The Glass Is Half Empty... Of Full

Before your store actually existed, did you envision its location to be one of your key marketing factors? If so, you are among the majority who plan for their storefront to do a lot more than offer great window displays. You wanted your store to talk – if not scream – how great it was by its products, prices and yes, location. Throw in some great customer service and you planned on being a rock star store owner. If only it were that easy. Nowadays, even a so-so location can't keep your business afloat. Rather than focus on the cons of the situation, try viewing the pros. By being in a so-so if not flat out bad location, you're encouraged to try and gain business outside of walk-in customers. This may include cross promotion marketing, attending community events, hosting various workshops, creating a newsworthy story and planning beyond traditional sales.

Look Outside Your Door

Some of the best ways to gain new business is to go beyond your store walls. In this particular scenario, you should consider your storefront similar to that of a warehouse. It's the perfect storing facility to hold lots of product, but it isn't necessarily going to draw in a crowd.

By looking outside your own store walls, you will find that many like-minded businesses exist in your community that can likely introduce you to new customers. A catering company, a local dress boutique or even a mom and pop café could be reaching out to the same customer you are. Once you have determined who you believe like-minded businesses to be, consider how you can cross promote each other's stores. While this alone may not get the foot traffic racing through your doors, it will help pick up the speed. It's very likely they will welcome a new marketing avenue as well, so your efforts will be warmly received.

Additionally, a great way to gain new customers despite a not-so hot-location is by getting a mini shop set up at community events. Festivals, fairs and other community events are always looking for great

booth sponsors to showcase fun products or services. This is the perfect chance to bring your product into the community where your customers shop. While selling your product is a top goal at these types of events, so is promoting your store location and other fabulous finds *only* to be seen in your unique shop. Offer a coupon incentive for customers to use exclusively in your store so that they will have an additional excuse to come visit... even if it's not in their immediate neck of the woods.

Be the Host Who Has the Most to Offer

More and more traditional retailers are introducing workshops, seminars and how-to events in their stores. Even if owners don't have a creative bone in their body, there is always something that can be shared and learned in a store environment. Consider what your customers enjoy doing or would like to learn. From crafting to creating holiday bouquets to learning about best retirement practices, your store can be the destination for various events, workshops, seminars and more. Now don't freak out... you don't have to host these from a literal perspective. You can invite other talented educators and designers to lead these. But as the store owner, it's your responsibility to provide a welcoming environment for people to learn, participate and listen. Then afterwards, give them time and comfort to shop. A few appetizers and refreshing drinks always keep people around a little longer. Add an incentive for all purchases made and you have a winning strategy for gaining new customers who otherwise may not have known you existed. Don't forget to make sure your session leader invites attendees to ensure your space will be filled.

Create a Newsworthy Story

Nothing screams for attention like a great story to be told. Your local media is practically begging for an interesting story - so give them one. Think outside the traditional "grand opening" or "anniversary" events and tell a story that isn't heard often. Are you a war veteran turned shop owner? Is there a fascinating collection in your store that isn't for sale but for viewing pleasures only? What inspired you to open your store in the first place? What may seem like no big deal to you could be a fabulous story that local patrons would want to know. Craft your story into a professional press release to be shared with the local media, then distribute it in an effort to gain some newsworthy attention. It's impressive what one article or a two minute news clip can do for foot traffic. So impressive, in fact, that you may want to create a *new* newsworthy story that's worth sharing after the initial buzz has died down.

Sales That Actually Stand Out

What makes a sale memorable to you? Is it the product? The price? Or the actual event that surrounds it? Often, sales blend in with other sales, other stores and other products. Yet when executed successfully, sales stand out as a go-to event that can't be missed – even if what they offer is the same as the store next door. By making your sale worth attending, you will gain a dedicated following of attendees each time it takes place. Annually or bi-annually should be your goal. What could be just another sale could be amped up with shopping prizes, raffles, sale incentives and more. A local guitarist playing in the background, a neighborhood pastry shop offering treats or an attending designer or guest can all help build up the momentum of a sale. Plan well in advance to educate your customers on why this is a not-to-be-missed event, communicate with your local media and plan for a one or two day

event that stands out. And don't get down on yourself if this year it isn't all you expected. By making it buzz-worthy each year, it will only get better.

At the end of the day, location doesn't have to matter – despite what its reputation is. If you combine smart selling strategies with great service and great product even in the middle of nowhere, you can still outsell the best corner location in your neighborhood that just uses their storefront as their only marketing tool.