

LET'S TALK BUSINESS

Ideas for Expanding Retail and Services in Your Community

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Retail Strategies to Capture Tourism Dollars Part 3. Service and Hospitality

Retailers who have been successful in selling to tourists have developed effective service and hospitality skills throughout their operations. They have accommodated the unique shopping needs of the visitor and have made shopping away from home easier.

This article summarizes some of the practices of retailers selling to tourists. These examples were identified through interviews with over 100 retailers in the Midwest. They reflect business operations in a variety of small communities, with varying levels of tourism activity.

1. **Provide visitor information.** The Pamida discount store in Neillsville, WI provides tourists with county maps, brochures and calendars free of charge. They listen carefully to their customers and provide items they may have forgotten.
2. **Set hours of operation in relation to area attractions.** The Log Cabin Store in Danbury, WI provides a convenient place to buy groceries, souvenirs, sporting goods, furs and moccasins. They sell these products to nearby casino visitors by maintaining the same hours as the gaming operation.
3. **Keep regular hours.** Carriage Haus Collectibles in Mayville, WI keeps regular hours as management realizes erratic hours are not acceptable to out-of-town customers. To the extent possible, operating hours should be coordinated among businesses and based on what is most convenient for the customer.
4. **Be sensitive to the visitors' schedule.** The Gift Shop at Eau Galle Cheese Factory in Durand, WI recognizes the tight schedules of tour groups and works hard to accommodate their scheduling needs. This encourages repeat visitation.
5. **Remember your customers' names.** In the best selling book titled *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie reminds us that a

person's name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language.

6. **Talk to each person that comes in the door.** The Hurley (WI) Coffee Company makes sure each visitor to the restaurant is greeted as they walk in the door. They try to find out something about each person, even if it's only where they are from.
7. **Offer free gift-wrapping.** The Stubli-Haus in Rockton, IL sells many gift items to tourists. Accordingly, free gift-wrapping is an important service for visitors when they are away from home.
8. **Deliver items to local hotels.** Serendipity Cards and Gifts in Port Washington, WI occasionally has customers who buy items that are awkward to carry. They offer delivery to the customer's hotel. If you offer delivery, post a sign in your store informing customers of this service.
9. **Offer shipping.** Finishing Touch, an antique furniture store at the Farm Market in Wautoma, WI offers free delivery to customers in Wisconsin and northern Illinois, encouraging people to buy larger items. Today's delivery options enable a retailer to ship something for arrival by the time the visitor returns home.
10. **Provide repair services to visitors.** Many of the travelers through Sublette, IL are motor home



The Stubli-Haus in Rockton, IL

- owners visiting the area's camping facilities on week-ends. Accordingly, Vaessen Chevrolet provides Saturday morning service hours.
11. **Know other languages.** The Wal-Mart in Saukville, WI is able to accommodate non-English speaking visitors by knowing which store associates can speak a second language.
 12. **Offer facilities for recreationists.** The Elroy Commons Trail Shop in Elroy, WI serves as a refreshing stop for bicyclists along the Elroy-Sparta Trail. Restrooms, water fountains, and showers are amenities greatly appreciated by many of this store's customers.
 13. **Be a source for recreational licenses.** Colwitz's Convenience store in Shiocton, WI is the only store in town that registers deer hunters. Typically registering up to 1,500 hunters each year, increases store sales.
 14. **Provide clean restrooms.** Clean restrooms are important as they make a positive statement about your business. One Wisconsin variety store has become a stop for bus groups and older travelers because of their clean restroom reputation. Once visitors are in the store, they purchase gifts and convenience items.
 15. **Put yourself in your guest's shoes.** The Creamery, an inn, restaurant, bar and gift shop in Downsville, WI pays particular attention to the unique needs of its customers. They recently accommodated a group of bicyclists arriving for dinner who had been drenched by a sudden downpour. The Creamery staff gave them a place to shower and dry clothes. They then dined comfortably while their clothes were laundered by inn staff.
 16. **Consider a toll-free phone number.** The Cedar Creek (WI) Winery offers an 800 number recognizing that 75% of their customers are tourists. This service is used to provide visitor information and updates on special events throughout the year.
 17. **Set an example for your employees.** Don't expect your employees to treat tourists well if you don't. Set high guest service standards for yourself and treat your employees like partners in living up to these standards.
 18. **Hire and take care of good employees.** The Norske Nook restaurants in Osseo, Rice Lake and Hayward WI attracts and retains high quality staff by paying higher wages to their staff and offering them health insurance and retirement programs. This investment in personnel has resulted in an excellent staff who are experienced in customer service.
 19. **Teach employees about the area.** Baumgartner's Cheese Store in Monroe, WI makes sure that their employees know area visitor points of interest and can give advice and directions to out-of-towners. Similarly, Root River Outfitters in Lanesboro, MN hires employees who know about canoeing, rafting, and bicycling activities and enjoy teaching about these activities.
 20. **Offer rentals.** Jones-Berry Lumber Company in Amboy, IL understands that second-home owners in nearby recreational areas often need power tools. Offering tool rentals has also increased sales of building materials. Similarly, the General Store in Campbellsport, WI rents boats, cross-country skis, snowshoes, and tandem bikes. They find that by offering rental equipment appropriate for area recreation, the store has enjoyed increased traffic and sales.
 21. **Develop a mission statement that recognizes hospitality.** The Fireside dinner theater in Fort Atkinson, WI constantly reminds staff and management of the importance of service and hospitality. Their mission statement reads "People will come where they are invited, where they have been made to feel welcome, and where they have been asked to return."
 22. **Accept Advanced Orders.** Hickory Acres Farm Gift Shop near Potosi, WI bakes many of its homemade breads, pies, and cakes to order. Visitors can make a trip to the store knowing that their desired selection will be ready and waiting for them.
 23. **Accept credit cards.** Credit card sales are expected to increase to one-half of all retail sales by the year 2000. Travelers often prefer to use charge cards so that they don't have to carry cash.
 24. **Guarantee your products and services.** Offer "no questions asked" policy. Typically, only a few people will take advantage of this guarantee. While we often want to focus on the rare customer that may abuse this policy, we often forget about the new business that is generated by this offer.
 25. **Improve your out-of-town return policy.** As tourists often reside far away, a convenient return by mail policy should be established.
 26. **Smile and practice effective human relations.** Management of the Log Cabin Store in Danbury, WI advises other retailers to be courteous, kind and patient. Effective service and hospitality is what brings them back as repeat customers.

Tourism and Retail Development

Do you want to learn more about how to sell to tourists in your community? The UWEX Center for Community Economic Development is developing an educational program to help communities and their retailers tap into this important market segment. Please contact us through your local Extension community resource development educator.

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