

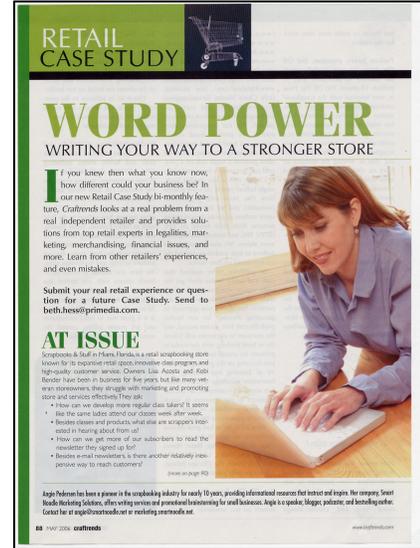
Retail Case Study: Word Power: Writing Your Way to a Stronger Store

AT ISSUE

Scrapbooks & Stuff, Miami, Florida is a retail scrapbooking store known for its expansive retail space, innovative class program and high-quality customer service.

Owners Lisa Acosta and Kobi Bender have been in business for five years but like many veteran storeowners, they struggle with marketing and promoting their store and services effectively. They asked:

- How can we develop more regular class takers? It seems like the same group of ladies attends our classes week after week.
- Besides classes and products, what else are scrappers interested in hearing about from us?
- How can we get more of our subscribers to read the newsletter that they signed up for?
- Besides email newsletters, is there another relatively inexpensive way to reach customers to remind them we are here?



CONSIDER THIS

Angie Pedersen, a marketing consultant specializing in communications and new media, provides the owners of Scrapbooks & Stuff with tips for how to communicate more effectively with their customers. These tips can be applied to any craft retailer situation, not just scrapbooking stores.

TEMPT NEW STUDENTS

The first step in class registration is writing an effective class description. Many classes fill (or don't) based solely on the appeal of the description. If your classes aren't filling like you'd like, chances are the class descriptions simply don't convince customers it's worth their time and money. Think of your class descriptions as sales copy – use them to “sell” the class. Your descriptions need to convince your customers that they *need* to take this class, that their lives will improve after taking the class. You can do this by detailing the features and benefits of each class. Describe what your customers will get, how they will feel, and how their lives will improve after participating.

Let's say you offer a scrapbooking layout class. The features of this class might be three 12x12 layouts, taught by a professional designer, using trendy brand name products. The benefits are learning valuable skills, preserving memories, satisfaction and relief from getting more photos scrapped, and time away from other responsibilities. Define your customers' needs and concerns, and address them in the text. Combine these features and benefits for an effective class description:

Is the stack of unscrapped photos on your desk taller than your two-year-old? Do you worry about forgetting important family stories? Do you feel like you'll never get caught up? If this sounds like you, join us for our next

Speed Scrapping class! You'll feel so good when you finish the three two-page 12x12 layouts in class! Designed by professional scrapper Susie Scissors, you'll use today's hottest products, and up to 20 photos! Imagine how relieved you'll feel when that photo stash gets smaller and smaller. Learn how to use the tools you already have to scrap faster, and be more productive. Get tips on documenting your stories in little pockets of time. Enjoy your "time off", and still get something done!

Use your copy to help customers imagine how wonderful the finished product will be and how good they'll feel – but only if they take this class!

“TRY THIS!”

When people come to your store, they are often looking for something they can't find in more general retail chains – personal attention and expertise. As the storeowner, customers see you as the expert on what techniques to try, what tools to use, and what will be “the coming thing”. They want you to share your expertise and enthusiasm. They want to know what you can do for them. Use in-store signage and flyers to help guide them -- not only through the store, but also through their hobby experiences.

Elaine Floyd, international speaker and author of *Marketing with Newsletters* (F+W Publications), calls in-store signs “your silent salespeople.” Your signage not only draws attention to specific products; it can also help sell that product. Use signs to inform and instruct, and you'll be a step closer to the sale.

The first signs customers will see are those in your front store window. Use the copy on your window signs to create curiosity about your services and lure people into the store:

- “Are your photos in piles and boxes? We can help!”
- “Need the perfect, one-of-a-kind gift? Let us show you how to create it yourself!”
- “No time? We'll do it for you!”

Realize that most passersby don't know much about your industry, and use copy to tap into the concerns of the general public.

Use active verbs in your signs, so the copy reads almost like a command:

- “Try this!”
- “Look Here!”
- “See What's New!”
- “Learn How to Use Your Tools”
- “Write on Any Surface”.

Remember the “Features & Benefits” tips; use the copy on your signs to point out how customers' projects will improve and their satisfaction will increase when they try a new product or technique: “Finish mats in seconds”, “Set eyelets perfectly every time”, “Write beautifully for any occasion”, “Never worry about losing a memory again”.

Here are some more specific ways to use signs in your store:

- Use signs as mini demo boards in your store. Choose products to demonstrate techniques, and then step out some easy instructions so customers can get the idea (and get excited) quickly. Place the signs near the product's location in your store.

- Use idea books as inspiration for projects, then feature those projects on signs saying, “As Seen In...”
- Select keywords that tap into customers’ base concerns – they want projects to be fast, easy, perfect, inspiring, and meaningful. Include these words prominently in your signage, and you’ll give your customers what they want.
- Floyd offers this design advice: “Design with strong, pure colors and bold sans-serif typefaces.” Use the same typeface and design elements on all the signs in the store.

NEWSLETTERS THAT EXCITE & ENTICE

Like the class descriptions, you need to convince customers that reading the newsletter is worth their time and money. Give them something they can get *only* in the newsletter, such as a coupon. Floyd suggests offering a coupon for a specific dollar amount discount. “Coupons that give a specific dollar amount off a sale pull better. We tested three different coupons to the same audience: one was a free gift, one was a % off, and one was \$5 off \$20 or more purchase. The \$5 off coupon pulled twice as well.” Remind customers of newsletter-only deals when they visit the store, and mention them on your website.

Headlines are key. In an email newsletter, write “juicy” subject lines about hot topics, so customers really want to find out more. Use ampersands and “+” signs to make the most of that precious character count.

- Once you get them to read the newsletter, use your copy to entice customers into the store. Tease them with pictures of projects they can view up close – in the store. Announce sales that last for only a few hours.
- Like the in-store signage, use active, commanding verbs to elicit a specific response. In advertising this is called a “Call to Action”: “Call now!”, “Register today!”, “Order by Friday!”.
- Yvonne DiVita, author of *Dickless Marketing: Smart Marketing to Women Online*, suggests announcing contests in newsletters. “Consider having a monthly contest - keep it simple, offer appropriate prizes, but build the momentum, so that subscribers will be eagerly looking for this month’s winner, and next month’s focus.” She also recommends delivering the newsletter regularly, so customers know to expect it. “Always leave them with expectation for the next one,” suggests DiVita. Give a teaser headline of an article or tips list to come.

POSTCARDS & BLOGS

For an inexpensive way to reach customers in-between newsletters, Floyd often uses postcard mailers. “Postcards are very cute and friendly. They look great on bright colored cardstock, which helps them pop out of the mail stack. They’re great for little snippets of news, and leading people to your website.” Floyd suggests creating postcard coupons: people can just bring in the postcard as the coupon, giving you the added benefit of measuring how effective the mailing was.

DiVita loves using weblogs, or “blogs”, to communicate with customers. “Blogging is huge and very cost-effective! ...Unlike a newsletter, a blog is more personal. By getting to know you better, via your blog, readers will be more inclined to sign up for your newsletter, and to visit your website, to buy your products. DiVita recommends using the blog hosting services at Typepad.com. To get an idea of how blogs work, visit <http://angiepedersen.typepad.com/consulting>, or DiVita’s blog at www.lipsticking.com.

DiVita offers this parting advice about communicating with customers, particularly women: “They like nice things, they like being asked their opinion, and they like having fun - if they can do it without upsetting their daily schedule. Find out how to accommodate those issues - and you’ll be golden.”

BIO: Angie Pedersen is a freelance writer, specializing in crafts, B2B, technical writing, and social media topics. Her areas of expertise include website content, blog marketing, and media communications. Find more samples of her writing at <http://angiewrites.com> .