

Attracting added sales

A presentation by Margaret Travis, Owner and Pattern Designer-In-Chief of Eazy Peazy Quilts at International Quit Market-Houston on October 28, 2011

Whew, we're here!

Can you believe after all the months of planning?

The title of our presentation is "Increasing business through add on sales...GUARANTEED." So, the fact is you're here because you want to grow your business.

A show of hands please...how many have been in business for more than 10 minutes, more than a year...more than three years? Then you already know how to do this, but I'm going to provide an insight that gives you a way grow while you're wrestling those alligators in your swamp. We're going to look at the forest instead of those trees.

Here's a pattern designer...owner of Eazy Peazy Quilts coming to talk to you about adding sales. Married for over 40 years. I've raised 2 kids and been around business all my adult life. Designed ad campaigns, and oversaw 1,000 volunteers at an LPGA tournament. I was doing the Eazy Peazy business filings at the same time as filling out my Medicare application, so I've been around the block.

I am passionate about writing great patterns, and doing all I can to support the independent quilt shops.

Don't look for a retail tab on my website, you won't find it. I do not sell retail. I can't look you in the eye, ask you to be my partner, carry my patterns, if I'm out there selling in competition. So, you can buy wholesale from me or you can buy from all the major distributors...in fact I encourage it. It's easier for you.

I view all of you as my business partners. So Partners, here we go!

I Like the letter "E"...so I have 3 "E's" for you to remember today.

Educate, Evaluate and Entertain...do these 3 E's well and sales will increase, Guaranteed.

You have three drivers in your business....yourself, your staff, and your customers. We'll see how Educate, Evaluate, and Entertain relate to them.

Educate Yourself

The fact that you are here proves that you know how important your continuing education is, the need to grow and learn. You're most likely reading magazines, websites, etc. but, are you using your distributor reps to greatest advantage?

If you're lucky you have one rep in your area who will go the distance telling you what's new, what's selling, where the sales are being generated.

How is your knowledge of social media? Do you have a fan page on Facebook? I'm a believer it's a way to connect with your loyal customers...posting your newsletter, letting them know what's new. How is your e-mail? How many addresses to you have? Do you ask for them at the register? Along with gathering the addresses how about birthdays? A gift shop in Orlando calls you on your birthday...just wanted to wish you a happy day. How brilliant is that? Not an e-mail, but a more personal touch.

Educate Your Staff

Are you maximizing the talents of your employees? Are they given chance to grow?

Do you have weekly staff meetings...start on time with a purpose...that is, your purpose. You don't want to have a formal agenda, but you need to know what you want to cover. Highlight new products. Discuss their advantages and benefits to the customer so they can speak to them.

Cheerlead! Discuss the products that are moving. Have a plan for suggesting new products. Use as a forum for new ideas and suggestions. Have an open mind...Every idea has a bit of usefulness in it. Maybe the suggestion can't be implemented in total, but partially.

Do you hire people who can leave their problems at the door? Are they positive? A simple smile to greet your visitors as they enter and as they leave does wonders. Do they represent you and your goals? Do they buy into your business goals?

Do they understand that you're not running a charity? There are some that don't make a connection that those sales they make turn into their paychecks! Do they have business cards to hand out when they are both in and out of the store? Cost is minimal...benefits are huge. They are your ambassadors...out among others. Encourage them to hand out their cards when they are out and about. They will be proud to represent you.

Educate your Customers

Are you reviewing the books and patterns in stock with the beginning sewer in mind so that they will be successful?

Do you have scheduled demo days to introduce new products? Again your local distributor's rep can be golden. Our Florida rep for Checker will stand on her feet all day, engaging customers. One shop said that when she had a demo day and invited the rep in, she sold out of over 25 Double Diamond rulers and took orders for more - at \$20 a pop, not bad for a few hours plus fabric sales and pattern

sales. Don't have a great rep? How about a local designer like myself? Do they have a personality? Can they speak about new products?

I regularly stand in shops and expos doing demos on Double Diamond rulers and Soft and Stable. We move loads of product! I don't charge...it's my way to give back to my partner.

When your customers come in...they want to know what's new...can you tell them? Can your staff? Do you have a bulletin board, or an easel with info of product and classes? Train your customers to stop here first.

Weekly notion you're going to highlight and demo and speak to. I quilted for years and didn't know that a 50 wt thread would improve my patchwork...I continued to sew with 14 needle and whatever thread I had. Shops sold me what I picked up, never told me there was something better.

How about classes that are ever-changing, meeting their needs. Make and take?

Evaluate Yourself

How is your attitude? Can you leave your problems at the door and smile even though you don't feel like it?

Evaluate your systems. You can't do it all so are systems in place so things can be done in your absence.

Evaluate how well you're doing against your competition. How well do you know it? When's the last time you shopped there to see what they had and how they were doing business? Get your friends and employees to regularly do this.

Evaluate your products. Some products may be the same, but if they are...your products are going to be better because of you.

Evaluate your competition. Got Wal-Mart and perhaps JoAnn's near you? That's not a bad thing....They are going to sell on price, price, price. You're not going to try to compete that way.

Their weak spots:

No help, no service. In our local Wal-Mart, you have to get the guy from behind the gun counter to come and measure your fabric. Now he does a fine job, but you're going to wait until he finishes selling a gun before you're going to get a half yard of interfacing.

No smiles. No names. When's the last time you were greeted with a smile? How are you? How's the family? Compete by learning names. Harder and harder, but it can be done, and there is no shame in asking. "I'm having a 'blond' or 'senior' moment and your name has just left my mind, can you help me? Then repeat the name.

Compete on enthusiasm – your big box competition employees usually show a great lack of it.

Evaluate your Customers

Know them. What is their age? If they mainly older it is a red flag going forward and you will need to grow a younger base. All studies point to more interest in the younger people. Need to develop a strategy to attract them. How about hiring a younger person who will relate?

How many of their names do you know? Address them? How impressive is it to your regular customer when she brings in a friend and she is welcomed by name. It elevates her standing and makes her feel special. That's guaranteed not to happen in the big box stores!

How do they want you to address them? Learned that in the South (which I love) there are some of the older lades that want to be called Mrs....fill in the blank. So if you walk up to them and say, "Hi, I'm Margaret Travis...I'm so glad you've come into my shop today." If she says, "I'm Mrs. John Doe," do not address her as anything else!

Longer in the store, more they will buy. Customers enter your door with the intention to find something new, something wonderful, a treasure. All you have to do is just help them discover it.

As a former mid-westerner...you Southern ladies can sell me anything with your charm and soft accent. I feel like a guest in your home just because of your voices. I love it. If you've got it...know it! Use it!

How well do you know your competition? Been there lately to survey their products, their signage, their classes, their employees, the environment? A cell phone is great to take pictures of their weak spots.

Eazy Peazy had the chance to have our patterns in JoAnn's – believe me when that e-mail comes you pay attention...600 stores! First thing I did was to go to JoAnn's to survey the pattern display area. Who was there, how did it look? Patterns were askew, one cover was upside down, not hung by designer. Was that how I wanted my patterns to look? Needless to say we're not in JoAnn's!

Impulse items

Every shop has items you can speak about at the register. As they check out, "You're going to want," 4 words...train your staff. Notice I said "want" not "need." It's an important distinction. Needs can be negative as in you need to go to the dentist, you need your mammogram. But how about, "You're going to WANT matching thread," "Have you considered this 50 wt Aurifil...it's going to change your life...patchwork or appliqué."

“Have you thought about using this environmentally friendly basting spray Sulky KK2000...not going to affect your lungs or gum up your needle...and it disappears in three days? Magic!”

“Do you know Bosal’s Batting Seam Tape will rescue all those little pieces of batting?”

As they leave...you have one last chance to interact with your customer and say good bye using their name with a smile. “Thanks for your business.” Even if they didn’t buy something. “Thanks for stopping by and hope to see you again soon!”

Entertain yourself

How many of you like me...work at or think about their business 7 days a week?

What do you think about when you wake in the middle of the night? When’s the last time you took a day or even a week to recoup...regroup? I’ve been pushing hard for 2 ½ years and have promised myself that there was going to be some down time after Market.

Are you hearing from your friends, “We never see you anymore”? If we don’t take care of ourselves, then we can’t take care of others.

Entertain your Staff

Unless you have a precedent, I’m not a huge fan of company parties - spend enough time together day in and day out. But how about breakfast during a staff meeting? Make it special...and healthy...fresh fruit, bagels.

Find something to celebrate...a sales goal met, a crazy date they might not know about.

Catch them doing something right! Verbalize your appreciation. If you need to bring a negative you know about the Oreo cookie approach, don’t you? Compliment, give the negative, then compliment...always end with a positive!

Handwritten note thanking someone for a job well done...be specific...it’s a lasting reminder that they are appreciated. Shine the spotlight on employees at the meeting. Let them bask for a moment or two. Pass on compliments you’ve received from customers.

Entertain your Customers

Sometimes feel like a party planner? Well you are!

Your business is all about relationships. You’re planning shop hops, special events, demo days...getting tired? I can imagine! Maybe time to re-think some of these?

Have a daily “party” in your shop... a place for laughter, a place for bonding...but with that...don't let it slip into a “pity party.” Don't let a negative customer suck the life out of the shop...listen for a minute or two, she maybe needs a place to safely vent...but then turn it around...you'll be doing her a favor.

I love this idea I read in a newsletter from Rita Fischel's store in Chillicothe, Ohio...”Bring a friend to class. Don't have, one...we'll lend you one...we have so many.” Who wouldn't want to attend with a welcome like that?

So many newcomers need quilt shops to find an out from the loneliness. Make it a meeting ground.

Music in the background...your choosing but make it relaxing and upbeat. If you have room...entertain the husbands of the quilters. It's tough to shop with your husband along - just feel you can't spend the time...offer what I call the “Onslo” chair. A little TV tuned to ESPN or the Golf Channel, but hide the clicker!

Event ideas...

Shop Hop for local stores...Judy Hansen of DeLand Quilt Shop organizes local stores...restaurant, candy store, etc. There's a special inside each store...gift card or basket as prizes. Gets new people into her store. Who doesn't need a spool of thread...or knows someone who quilts. How many people will step inside her doors that would never before? Sell gift cards to the non quilters for their friends who do.

Showers...Do a simple project...placemats (I have an easy pattern as does my friend Julie Creus of LaToderia. She's in the booth next to me.) Let the shower planners do the food and refreshments, you get to do the instruction.

Caveat...would not let anyone spike the punch...too many sharp objects not to mention the hot irons! You're offering a relaxed venue and are growing your future customers.

More spontaneous little parties. Use your e-mail and newsletters to alert. Maybe just an e-mail...”Two days from now”...give them a reason to return!

Educate! Evaluate! Entertain! “Secrets” to guaranteeing added sales

You're going to get lots of papers...instead of handing you this outline today I'll put it on my website on the “Just For Quilt Shops Only” page. I invite you to stop by booth 1215. I have a gift for you if you'll identify yourself as having attended this schoolhouse. I'd love to have time to talk further with you...do come by!

We're in this together! Thank you my partners!