



THE LOCAL BRIEF

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Engage with your Community

Independent retail News, www.talkingretail.com, Juliet Morrison, January 2011

Independent stores are by their nature, part of the community in a way that multiples with their head offices in a distant city can never be. But being a true community business means a lot more than simply sharing a postcode with your customers. Here are 11 tips on some of the things outlets can do to win over their neighbourhood:

1. Street parties:

The great British tradition of street parties is an ideal way to get to know your neighbours. And with the royal wedding set for Friday 29th April, why not arrange your own? Your customers may be in the mood for celebrating, with the extra bank holiday and little to party about in the last 18 months. And the popularity of William and Kate means the occasion could be another Golden Jubilee of 2002 or Millennium. Provide food from your business: it could be a chance to show off the strides that have been made in own-label, for example. For more advice, contact www.streetparty.org.uk

2. Parcel acceptance:

With long opening hours, convenience stores are ideally placed to offer the invaluable service of accepting parcels for their neighbours who are away from home. Families at work will be thankful of being able to use your address as a collection point and will invariably buy something from you while picking up the parcel. Make sure your customers realise you offer this service and perhaps if you are a retailer with a PayPoint terminal, investigate joining the Collect+ delivery scheme. So far 3,500 independent retailers are signed up to send and receive packages from a number of major direct retailers including, Littlewoods, Very, Kays, Boden, M&M Direct and House of Fraser - receiving around 40p for each parcel handled.

3. Install a community notice board:

Make your store the hub of the community with an in-store notice board for your customers to display messages, adverts and event guides. Footfall makes an effective way for customers to advertise for a cleaner, a home for a guinea pig or a local event. Ensure it is kept up to date and appropriate to your family customer base.

4. Back local events:

Get to know who is running local charities and volunteer your shop as the refreshments supplier. You could supply food and drink on a sale-or-return basis, or if you were feeling charitable you could sell it to the organisers at cost price, or give a discount. For starters, approach the Salvation Army, Rotary Club or Round Table to see how you could help.

5. Free glass hire:

If you have an off-licence, offering free glass hire for functions can help you to win extra alcohol business. Word will soon spread that you offer this service and you will be the one-stop shop for entertaining.

6. Engage with the local school:

This is an effective way to get youngsters on side, whether it is supplying food and drink as gifts for fairs, giving classroom talks to children about healthy eating or offering work experience or career guidance.

7. Back local business:

Stocking local produce, displaying neighbourhood artists' work and introducing a loyalty card scheme with nearby retailers are some examples of how to support fellow businesses.

8. Raise money for charity:

Raising funds for charity has become more sophisticated than simply displaying collection tins at the till. The trend now is to encourage customers to come up with a charity they want to donate to.

9. Make it an occasion:

By embracing a range of occasions from Hindu festival of lights (Diwali) to next year's Rugby World Cup, retailers not only show they are engaged with the community but also that their store is a fun, dynamic place to be.

10. Free home delivery for the aged and infirm:

This shows customers you really go one step further than the multiples when it comes to caring for the community. To keep things manageable, a five mile radius restriction could be imposed.

11. Sponsor a local sports team:

Whether it is a kids' judo association trying to attend an international tournament or a football team buying strips, sports clubs always need funds. A donation of up to £500 will go far and be appreciated, but displaying your store's logo will give you valuable, long-lasting advertising and a huge amount of goodwill.

Useful Contacts:

My shop is your shop: www.myshopisyourshop.co.uk

Streets Alive: www.streetparty.org.uk

PayPoint Collect+: www.collectplus.co.uk

Don't Forget....

Burns' Night on the 25th January, make sure you stock your neeps, tatties, haggis and whisky to celebrate the festivities in style!



It's National Bramley week from the 6-13th February. Be sure to get stocked up on all sorts of apple pies, crumbles and Bramleys. Encourage your customers to take part and celebrate this delicious cooking apple.



Next up is Fairtrade Fortnight from February 28th to March 13th.

View their website to find out how to get involved: www.fairtrade.org.uk/



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Suzie Brown, Northamptonshire ACRE, Hunsbury Hill Centre, Harksome Hill,
Northampton, NN4 9QX.

Tel: 01604 825 890

Email: suzie.brown@northantsacre.org.uk