

LET'S TALK BUSINESS

Ideas for Expanding Retail and Services in Your Community

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Retail Strategies to Capture Tourism Dollars Part 2. Shopping Experience

Retailers who have been successful in selling to tourists have developed a unique and memorable shopping experience for their customers. They have made their stores an attraction in the community, offering the visitor more than just a place to buy goods.

This article summarizes how some retailers have made shopping an enjoyable and engaging experience that complements tourism. 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. **Offer an authentic atmosphere that takes the customer to a different place.** A visit to the Von Rothenburg Bier Stube in Germantown, WI is like a trip to a beer garden in Germany. They serve authentic imported beer, indoors or outdoors, in surroundings much like one would find in Germany.
2. **Provide an entertaining and fun experience.** Downtown Mt. Horeb, WI draws many visitors in part because of a shop that sells mustards and offers a lot of humor. Visitors to the Mustard Museum are entertained with products such as "Evaporate Your Eyeballs Hotsauce" and collegiate T-shirts carrying the name "POUPON U."
3. **Offer an unusual mix of attractions within your store.** The Bear Paw in Rice Lake, WI is one of the Midwest's most unique sporting goods stores as it combines an animal museum with a specialty gift shop and archery and dart gun range. It offers a unique shopping environment for the entire family.
4. **Make shopping easy for parents.** The Stubli-Haus gifts in Rockton, IL welcomes customers with coffee, a table for children to play games, and soothing background music. Similarly, Serendipity Cards and Gifts in Port Washington, WI provides a

play area in the back of the store for small children. Parents feel more at ease when they don't have to constantly worry about their children.

5. **Appeal to the senses of sight, smell and sound.** The Alpine Chocolat Haus in Gaylord, MI makes candy on the premises and attracts many customers by allowing them to watch the candy production. The aroma of the cooking chocolate helps sales. Similarly, Das Wurst Haus in Lanesboro, MN sells great German food and draws customers with the sound of an accordion.
6. **Provide samples.** Miller's Cheese House in Rice Lake, WI offers samples to visitors before they buy. People, especially tourists, are more likely to buy if they can sample the products offered.
7. **Offer tours of your community.** Down a Country Road craft store in rural Cashton, WI sells furniture, quilts and rugs as well as country crafts and gifts. As a special service to their customers, they offer an hour and a half hour tour of the near-



DasWurst Haus in Lanesboro, MN

by Amish community. For a fee, the store owner rides with the customers in their vehicle, making various stops to talk about Amish history, traditions and customs.

McGuire, B. Pinkovitz, and A. Torketson. 1999.

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8. **Offer different weekly events.** Appleworks/Germantown Orchards in Germantown, WI plans different activities every weekend. This encourages repeat visits from customers attracted by new and different events.
9. **Talk to your visitors about your products.** Operators of Rural Route 1 Popcorn take time to meet and talk with customers about their specialty popcorn business. They share information on the development, production, packaging, and distribution of products.
10. **Provide an educational experience.** Alpine Gardens and Calico Shop in Stitzer, WI offers customers an opportunity to tour and learn about its large selection of alpine plants. Operators accommodate many tour groups including school and garden clubs.
11. **Provide a hands-on experience.** The Antique Market in Watertown, WI is an old lumberyard that has been renovated into several specialty shops and an antique mall. Each day, different artisans set up shop and provide an interactive environment where customers can learn about the trade.
12. **Provide a step back in time.** Freeman Sports in Yorkville, IL displays antique hunting equipment, classic Evinrude boat motors, and a collection of antique fishing lures. These displays make a trip to this store similar to a museum.
13. **Become a fond tradition for visitors.** The Cheddar Box Cheese House in Shawano, WI has become a tradition where generations of families return year after year. Tourists return to the store to relive their precious childhood vacation memories and offer them to their own children.
14. **Celebrate your visitors.** The walls of Colwitz's Convenience Store in Shiocton, WI are decorated with photographs of sportsmen and their trophy game taken from the area. Visitors receiving this recognition are likely to return to the area and the store.

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.

This summary was prepared by Bill Ryan, community business development specialist with the UWEX Center for Community Economic Development. Content drawn from a draft guidebook titled Tourism and Retail Development: How Businesses in Your Community Can Sell to Tourists, written by B. Ryan, J. Bloms, J. Hovland, D. Scheler, with contributions from P. Alexander, J. Braatz, R. Burke, H. Hanson, M. Jones, K.

Center For Community Economic Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension
1327 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53715

PH: (608)265-8136; FAX: (608)263-4999; TTY: (800)947-3529; HTTP://WWW.UWEX.EDU/CES/CCED

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