

# GUERRILLA MARKETING FOR HOLIDAY DOLLARS>>

How is your year shaping up so far? If you're like many retailers, your hopes are high but your bottom line is still a little weak.

Take heart. With some savvy planning, creativity and elbow grease, it's not too late to close out 2010 well in the black. Shoppers are out there again; they're just holding on a little tighter to their dollars. We've identified two key tracks for getting them to loosen their grip: community-centered sales strategies and outside-the-box event planning.

What follows are features that target both sales and special events, backed up by real-life success stories from retailers who've put great ideas into play. If you start now, there's no reason why your gallery can't be ringing in the holiday season with plenty of sales.

BY MARILYN MILLSTONE



*Quirk Gallery promotes itself by supporting its neighborhood in Richmond, Va., and participating in "Saturday Stroll" events.*

## BANDING TOGETHER FOR BETTER SALES>>

Prepare for the holiday season with a community-centered campaign that helps locals rediscover your gallery

**"A SENSE OF COMMUNITY." BUILDING YOUR HOLIDAY MARKETING STRATEGY AROUND THIS TRADITIONAL IDEA SEEMS TO BE A SECRET TO GETTING THROUGH THESE TOUGH TIMES.** But there's a twist—today's successful gallery owners are blending tried-and-true sales techniques with high-tech know-how to get recession-weary Americans out having fun and shopping again.

Diana Mathews, manager of Quirk Gallery in Richmond, Va., wanted to bring locals back into her gallery and the surrounding neighborhood businesses. Her idea? Use Twitter to solicit ideas about what makes Richmond special, select the best responses, then create a boldly designed deck of playing cards called "52 Reasons to Love Richmond."

"Each card has a tweet about something to do or see in Richmond, and lists the contact information for that business," Mathews explains. The cards—which are sold at Quirk and various area restaurants, coffee shops and retail stores—are now in their second printing. Some businesses are using them like coupons, offering discounts to customers who bring in a card with the name of their business on it. >>



*Alan Avery Art Company uses animal-themed pieces like Christopher Griffin's "Alpha" to raise money for the Atlanta Humane Society.*

## PLANNING PARTIES WITH SHOPPERS IN MIND>>

Gear up for the holidays with attention-grabbing events

**STEP INTO HARMONY WORKS ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH AND YOU'RE NOT IN AN ART GALLERY, YOU'RE IN A SPIRITUAL OASIS.** For \$20, you can sample the specialties of various holistic practitioners from around Redondo Beach, Calif. Get a massage. Have a tea-leaf reader tell your fortune. Experience acupuncture, ThetaHealing, Reiki.

Michael and Royce Morales, who opened the gallery 16 years ago, say the popular program, "RE-Store Yourself," was born out of necessity. "Given the economy, we needed to do something to bring people in," Royce explains. "It's also in keeping with our intention to have a place that's healing, loving, nurturing." She was surprised at how easily the events came together—a quick e-mail to a few friends generated nine holistic practitioners who were willing to work without pay, happy to get the community exposure. >>



#### POWER IN NUMBERS

Appealing to people's love of community is also the inspiration behind the "buy local, support local" campaign launched by Show of Hands Gallery in Denver during the 2009 holiday season. Hinging on the statewide "Colorado Local First" campaign, the gallery solicited inspiring statements from 25 local artists, enlarged each one onto foam core and hung them throughout the gallery. "It was a powerful statement," says gallery co-owner Douglas Brugger. The display was "so well received and appreciated." Brugger says, he has decided to "reboot it regularly."

The 27-year-old gallery joined Denver's Mile High Business Alliance in 2009. "We decided that because business was tough and the economy is rough, we needed to be really careful with our advertising dollars," he says. Show of Hands now focuses its marketing efforts solely on "the fact that we're a local independent business marketing local artists."

A similar focus is taking place with independent galleries in Alexandria, Va.

Led by the Torpedo Factory Art Center, a complex of galleries and artist studios perched on the Potomac, 13 local businesses have banded together to launch the "Handcrafted Alexandria" campaign. "We realized that we're much more powerful if we pool our resources," says Claire Mouldoux, who was the director of communications for the Torpedo Factory at the time the campaign was developed.

The campaign has a vibrant website, [www.handcraftedalexandria.com](http://www.handcraftedalexandria.com), and sponsored its first major affair, the Spring Shopping Event, in May. The event featured a sweepstakes: shoppers obtained a form from the website or from partner stores and got it stamped at 10 locations during the 11-day extravaganza. Prizes included a free hotel night's stay, restaurant gift cards and \$50 gift certificates to participating businesses, including the Torpedo Factory Art Center, Artercraft, Fibre Space, The Art League, Imagine Artwear and Ten Thousand Villages. Anyone entering the contest received a colorful "Handcrafted Alexandria" reusable shopping bag. >>

Fibre Space (far left) changes its colorful displays weekly to stay fresh for events like Handcrafted Alexandria's Spring Shopping Event. Shoppers who entered a contest at the event were given reusable shopping bags.



Harmony Works attracts customers with massages right inside the gallery at popular monthly "RE-Store Yourself" events.

The Moraleses are also vegetarians, and the shop—which offers an array of all-natural products like candles and essential oils in addition to handmade American craft—contains a small selection of vegetarian cookbooks. They periodically hold a "Foods that Help Us" class, taught by raw-foods expert Leah Schaening. The two-hour class costs \$20, and includes a

meal Schaening prepares. A special class on how to make healthy meals over the holidays is in the works.

Is all of this good for gallery sales? "Yes," Royce says emphatically. "It has made a huge difference in foot traffic. Ultimately, that's always good for sales. Even if people can't afford a piece of art, they often buy a few cards."

#### GETTING CREATIVE

Let's face it: everybody loves a party. A few well-planned and -executed events held throughout the year, and leading into the holiday season, can create a lot of buzz. The idea is to transition your gallery from a mere place of business to a fun, active community meeting place.

But you don't have to go it alone. In Lexington, Ky., Mike Stutland, owner of

**"Collaborating with people who bring their customer base with them is critical."**

—Mike Stutland, owner, Artique Gallery

Artique Gallery, finds collaboration is key to his 30-year success. To celebrate this fall's World Equestrian Games—the largest sporting event in Kentucky's >>



Leslie Wallace-Coon's cute ceramic sculptures were featured at Alan Avery Art Company's Atlanta Humane Society benefit.



For Adam Winer, manager of Artcraft, the campaign couldn't have come at a more critical time. "We've needed a single entity dedicated to marketing on our behalf for a long time," he says. Winer is grateful that for a \$500 contribution, Artcraft is linked on the campaign's website. "It's not a significant investment, but it packs a lot of punch," he says.

#### PROMOTING HANDCRAFTS

While galleries are banding together at the local level, Craft Retailers & Artists for Tomorrow (CRAFT) has launched a "Glorious American Craft" marketing campaign designed to encourage galleries from coast to coast to celebrate the uniqueness of handmade American craft.

The campaign's centerpiece is a cheerful sunburst logo emblazoned with the phrase "Glorious American Craft." "We

*Show of Hands Gallery sets itself apart by promoting local Colorado artists like Pam Caidin, whose necklace is pictured here. Artcraft (left) has taken advantage of the "buy local" momentum with the Handcrafted Alexandria campaign.*

**"Customers love 'Glorious American Craft' gift wrap because they feel the person receiving the gift will know it's something special."**

—Ann Pifer, owner,  
The Grand Hand Gallery

wanted to create something akin to a 'wool mark,' raising consumer awareness that products handcrafted in America have value," says CRAFT vice president Ann Pifer. Promotional materials include window decals and special gift wrap.

Pifer, who owns The Grand Hand Gallery in St. Paul, Minn., instructs her staff to use the campaign's gift wrap at all >>



*Quirk Gallery's "52 Reasons to Love Richmond" deck of cards is sold by several local merchants. The gallery turned to Twitter to find out what locals loved most.*



*Harmony Works pairs fun events like holistic healing and cooking classes with light-hearted merchandise like these pillows by Alexandra Ferguson.*

history—Stutland will convert the local Hilton's common areas into a huge gallery featuring a number of mostly equine artists. He's also partnering with the Kentucky Horse Park, bringing in acclaimed sand-sculptor Damon Farmer to create a 100-ton piece to commemorate the games; Farmer's

progress will be broadcast via web cam. "Collaborating with people who bring their customer base with them is critical," Stutland explains.

Like most galleries, Artique sparkles with special events during the holidays. The most popular event? "Ladies Night Out." Stutland partners with Whole Foods to serve up artisan cheeses, organic wine and chocolates, and features artist demonstrations.

Ladies' Night is followed by a complementary Men's Night, which involves less pampering and more purchasing. "Women at Ladies Night fill out a wish list of items they'd like," Stutland says. "Men who bring in the list get discounts." The appeal for men? Bourbon. "Men love a bourbon tasting," Stutland says. "So we give them what they love."

#### CAPTURING THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT

But holiday events need not be elaborate to be effective. Some of the most successful events are tied to the season's charitable spirit. In Atlanta, Ga., Alan Avery Art Company holds extended shopping

hours one Sunday each December and donates a portion of the proceeds to the Atlanta Pet Rescue. Alan Avery also partnered with the Catherine Kelleghan Gallery and four other Atlanta galleries in May to promote their monthly First Thursday Gallery Walk benefiting the Atlanta Humane Society.

And don't forget the magic of live music. For years, The Waygoose gallery has invited local harpist Sue Richards to serenade shoppers at their Bethesda and Rockville, Md., locations. "Anything you can do that's different is always good," says owner Deborah Simon. "How many people would have a harp player in their store? It's unusual without being overwhelming."

Simon tries to schedule Richards' performances when foot traffic is highest: pre-holiday weekend afternoons. She promotes the events through Facebook >>

*When Mike Stutland plans events for Artique Gallery, he goes big. He asked artist Damon Farmer, pictured here with a 2009 sculpture, to create a 100-ton sand sculpture for an event later this year.*





Handcrafted Alexandria brings together 13 art and retail businesses for collaborative marketing and event planning. Artist Lane Palmisano is part of the Torpedo Factory Art Center, which launched the campaign.

times. "Customers love it," she says, "because they feel the person who's receiving the gift will know it's something special." CRAFT's website also offers downloadable print ads. "This kind of universal branding benefits us all," says Pifer.

CRAFT is also spearheading the first-ever American Craft Week, Oct. 1-10. Envisioned as a grassroots effort to raise public awareness of American craft, the program encourages galleries, museums and schools to hold events that are open to the public. For a nominal fee of \$25, anyone participating in American Craft Week can have their event linked on the central website, [www.americancraftweek.com](http://www.americancraftweek.com).

#### THE BIG PICTURE

Your art gallery is much more than the world created within its four walls—it's on a street, which runs through a neighborhood, which is part of a city or town. Whether by "tweet," old-fashioned "meet-and-greet" or a gift tied with a "glorious" ribbon, galleries that craft a sense of community may well end the year with the brightest balance sheets. ■

## HOLIDAY PREDICTIONS



Karen Dynan is the vice president and co-director of economic studies at the Brookings Institution.

To understand how today's economic realities will affect your customers this holiday season, we spoke with Karen Dynan, vice president and co-director of economic studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

"The good news is that the economy appears to be on the mend," Dynan says. "Spending has been growing since the middle of last year, and even the job picture is looking brighter, with employment having increased every month this year."

However, because the unemployment rate remains "stubbornly high," and people have suffered "big declines" in the value of their homes and stock portfolios, Dynan feels

Americans are going to remain focused on saving, and be less willing to splurge.

She suggests that retailers of American craft view "the new thriftiness" positively. "After all, galleries offer unique products that are enduring assets, in contrast to other types of splurges that bring much shorter-lived enjoyment," she says.

#### With Dynan's words in mind, consider the following:

**Find a cause.** To celebrate Earth Day last year, Show of Hands Gallery in Denver sent out an e-mail to patrons explaining that the gallery wanted to begin using recycled bags rather than purchasing new ones. Anyone who brought in 12 recycled bags could pick a small gift from a thank-you basket of items including local Colorado-made peanut butter and Boulder-based Chocolive candy bars. "People tell us that they think what we're doing is totally cool, and they bring new people in the door," says gallery co-owner Douglas Bruggier.

**Focus on family.** To further foster a sense of community, Show of Hands launched a recycled art program last year, asking customers to donate art that they no longer wanted. The gallery re-sold the art for \$5 to \$100, with the proceeds going to Creation Station, an art experience for kids held during the Cherry Creek Arts Festival.

**Appeal to the future.** Ann Pifer, owner of The Grand Hand Gallery in St. Paul, Minn., finds her customers are becoming increasingly frugal and thoughtful. "They're talking themselves out of impulse purchases," she says. "If they're going to part with their dollars, they better be convinced it's for something enduring, something their grandchildren might like!"—M.M.

## NAME-DROPPING EVENTS

William Shatner. Hear the legendary television actor's name and, depending on your age, you think of Captain James T. Kirk, T.J. Hooker or Denny Crane. But Mike Stutland, owner of Artique Gallery in Lexington, Ky., knows the Emmy-winning actor by a different name: friend. Shatner and his wife Elizabeth, who have a home in Kentucky, have been Stutland's customers for years. This past year, Elizabeth approached Stutland about the possibility of displaying some of her digital photography in his gallery. "She's an emerging talent," Stutland says.

That's when Stutland's knack for envisioning grand events kicked in. Thinking Mother's Day—a major gift-buying holiday for the gallery—he planned "The Enchanted Garden" exhibition, featuring Elizabeth's flower photography amid a showcase of flower-related works in jewelry, blown glass and sculpture. The Shatners attended the invitation-only reception and a public opening the next day; they also came back for a Mother's Day "meet-and-greet." "We had a huge crowd, lots of press, lots of TV coverage," Stutland says. "We got a lot of mileage—you cannot buy that kind of advertising."

Incredibly, the captain of the Starship Enterprise himself helped hang the show. "He was literally holding Elizabeth's art up while I was nailing it to the wall," Stutland says.—M.M.



Actor William Shatner and his wife Elizabeth brought star power to an Artique Gallery event in May.

and a monthly e-newsletter; Richards talks up the gig in her own extensive network in the music community.

**"Anything you can do that's different is always good."**

—Deborah Simon, owner, The Waygoose

#### SPICE IT UP

In the end, it's not the size, but the spirit of a holiday event that matters most. Consider Stutland's foodie philosophy: "I'm like a chef," he says. "I start with a good main course, then I prepare a special meal using all the exotic ingredients in my cabinet of fresh herbs and spices." Now get in the kitchen and start cooking! ■

Marilyn Millstone is a regular contributor to NICHE. She writes about business and the arts from her home in Kensington, Md.



The Waygoose gallery invites local harpist Sue Richards to serenade holiday shoppers on busy days.