

ON SALES

LOW-COST COOL



Make yours a cool store with a few good ideas, says **Shane Decker**.

[WITH ENOUGH MONEY, anyone can build a cool-looking store. But it takes ingenuity, innovation and good old-fashioned elbow grease to provide the type

hire a chef to come in every day at 11 a.m. The employees eat in one-hour shifts. Everyone gets a home-cooked, healthy meal. They get to sit down and eat, and they don't have to leave. The store provides this service every day, six days a week, *all year long*.

9. SERVICE CALLS The sales staff knows to call each diamond customer half a year after their purchase to remind the customer, "You bought a nice diamond ring six months ago. Every six months we like to tighten the prongs, shine it up and make it look like new. It's just like keeping your car serviced — and even more important." When customers bring in their rings, they enjoy refreshments and chocolate-chip cookies while they wait. The call lets people know how important their jewelry is, and how important they are to the store.

10. REFERRAL REWARDS Each paying customer gets a business card, and the customer is asked to put his own name on the back. The customer can give it to a friend. If the friend brings in the card and makes a purchase, the original customer receives a \$100 gift certificate to a local restaurant. Talk about motivation!

What do all these services have in common? They add up to *make stores cool*. Who knows? Do enough of them, and your store might wind up America's Coolest Store.

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of services that will keep customers coming back again and again. Here are the top 10 I've come across in my travels; the stores shall remain anonymous.

1. BRIEFCASE PRESENTATIONS This store's sales associates go through the local Yellow Pages to find addresses for professional business groups in the area (doctors, lawyers, etc.). Then, they write letters to these professionals, saying we know your time is precious, so call us, let us know what you'd like to purchase for your wife or girlfriend, and we'll bring a selection up to your office. The closing ratio for these "briefcase presentations" is off the charts — around 80 to 90 percent.

2. CHARITY BATTERIES Each year, the store's staff buys three large cans, slits a hole in the top of each, and labels each one with a different charitable organization. The store charges \$15 to change a watch battery, but all the money goes to charity — \$5 for each can. Suddenly, customers don't mind paying a little to have their battery changed. The store builds an outstanding reputation in the community, and they get to "wow" every customer and show them something while they're in the store. As a result, they change 15 to 30 batteries a day.

3. GUARANTEED REPAIRS Anytime a repair is late, this store apologizes to the customer, and tells them they'll deliver the piece when it's finished. If it's late, they charge only for the parts... no labor fees. On top of

that, the customer gets a \$50 gift certificate to a local restaurant. With this system in place, customers probably hope their repair *is* late! And it wards off complaints.

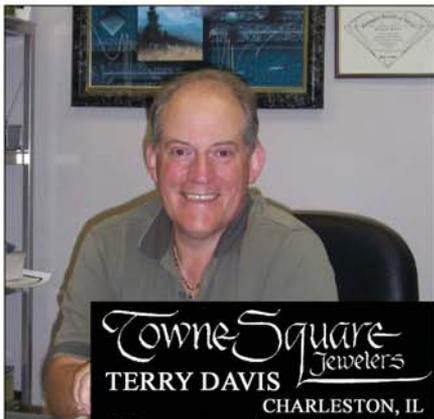
4. VALET PARKING The store is located in a busy downtown area, so they valet-park customers' cars for free! When the customer is finished shopping, they go pick up the car and bring it around front for the customer.

5. CAR WASHES Two workers in the parking lot wash the customers' cars while they shop. Windex on the windows, shammy the bumpers, and wipe the whole thing down like new. Who wouldn't like a free car wash?

6. SHOE SHINES A worker shines men's shoes while they browse the diamond selection, or even just while their wives are looking around. Again, it's free for customers — the store covers the worker's fees.

7. FREE WEDDINGS On Valentine's Day every year, this store brings in a priest, a rabbi and a preacher. No, it's not a joke — they marry people right in the store, for free, as long as they've purchased their wedding bands or engagement ring from the jeweler. People line up for this service. The record for a single day is 22 weddings.

8. EMPLOYEE LUNCH This store hated that employees had to leave the store to eat, wasting their down time driving down the street and living off fast food. So, they decided to



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