

# The Retail Review

The Voice of Vermont Retailers

www.vtretailers.com

January 2011

www.vtstores.com



Vermont Retail Association



Vermont Grocers'  
Association

Serving Vermont's Food Industry Since 1934

## 2011 Legislative Conference & Luncheon

As the legislature and administration convene in Montpelier for the first half of the new biennium, VRA and VGA are there to follow and advocate issues important to the industry. We hope that you will participate in the associations' annual legislative conference on **February 24**.

2011 began with a new governor and administration, new lieutenant governor and new senate leader. It is an important chance to gain access to the new state leaders.

***Governor Shumlin and Lt. Governor Scott are schedule to participate.***

The program offers members of the industry a unique opportunity to learn more about the legislative process; meet key lawmakers and receive updates on important issues before the General Assembly. Face to face meetings with state legislators allows members an excellent opportunity to discuss issues of concern by sharing first hand experiences of how their businesses are affected by state policies.

Legislative Day at the Capitol is a chance to meet fellow members as well as your elected representatives. It is an investment in your business.

For more information check out the following links:

Program Outline: <http://vtgrocers.org/files/files/2011%20legislative%20day%20brochure.pdf>

Online registration: <http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07e380r2xdb3d6cdfb&11r=iof4vtn6>

### Schedule of Events

- 8:30 a.m. Registration & Coffee  
***Cafeteria, State House***
- 9:30 a.m. Conference Begins  
***Room 10 – State House***
- 10:30 a.m. Senate/House  
***Committee Meetings***
- 12 noon Legislative Luncheon  
***Capitol Plaza Hotel, 100 State St.***
- 1:30 p.m. State House Meetings  
***An afternoon State House Schedule will be available to members wishing to return to the capitol.***
- 4:00 p.m. State House Reception  
***Hosted by Vermont Specialty Food and Vermont Brewers***



## President's Corner

Bonnie Hawley, President  
VRA Board of Trustees

# Make Your Voices Heard!

We don't usually think of winter as the season of rebirth, but it definitely is that this year, given the legislature's just-born session and the appearance of our new Governor, Peter Shumlin. Regardless of which side of the political aisle you sit on, it is an exciting time of change bringing new faces and ideas, new proposals for laws and regulations—and new opportunities.

Not least among those opportunities is the chance to make your voice heard by those who shape legislation and cast votes in Montpelier. Living day by day in Vermont, it is all too easy to forget how very fortunate we are to have such ready access to our legislators. You only need to ask someone from a more populous state whether they could call up and talk to one of their state legislators to appreciate our own *very* local government.

Every legislative session brings new challenges, and this one is no different. This year the state has a new governor and a group of new representatives and senators. There will be a broad range of legislation that may affect retailers including health care reform, tax reform and many different environmental and consumer issues. Of course, VRA will be there, representing the retail community's interests, at every turn. Our visibility and influence have grown apace these last few years, and we're confident they will continue to do so.

*Your* influence on the legislature is crucial as well. There's a great deal of talk these days about our U.S. Constitution and what exactly the framers intended when they drafted it. One thing they surely did *not* intend was a government that is inaccessible to those governed. That Constitution shaped our federal laws and government of course. But it's safe to say Vermont's citizen legislature, with its access and responsiveness, is what the framers had in mind for the federal structure as well. We enjoy a rare privilege to live still with such access to government, and the best way to preserve that access is to make good use of it.

## BECOME A FAN OF OUR FACEBOOK PAGE

**Vermont Retail Association**



Please let us know what type of information you would like to have us post on our Facebook page. What would be of interest and help to you in your business?



**START SAVING TODAY!**

**Start saving money today through energy efficiency with lighting upgrades.**

Efficient lights use less energy, provide quality light, enhance the appearance of merchandise, and come in styles that fit the look of any store.

To learn more about boosting your bottom line, call Efficiency Vermont toll-free today at 888-921-5990.



The **newLIGHT Enhanced Rebate Program** has been extended through December 1, 2011. Talk to your contractor or visit [www.encyvermont.com/newlight](http://www.encyvermont.com/newlight) to learn more about replacing your T12s with more efficient lighting.

**888-921-5990 | [www.encyvermont.com](http://www.encyvermont.com)**

## **Are You Making These 7 Retail Marketing Mistakes?**

As an independent retail store owner you have to wear LOTS of hats - including Chief Marketing Officer. Check to see if you might be making one of these common Retail Marketing Mistakes...

### **#1. Your Marketing is "All About Me"**

If I had to pick the most common (and most deadly) retail marketing mistake, this would be it. Everyone thinks that their products, their services, their promotions, and their store are far more fascinating than they really are. It's only natural. To you, the most important thing in the world is - you!

I hate to be the one to break it to you, but your customers don't really care that much about

you, or your store, or your products. Like you, what they care most about is themselves.

The trick for you as a retail marketer is to **stop thinking about what you offer and start focusing on what your customer wants**. It's the only way to build the kind of customer relationships that engender real trust, strong loyalty, and repeat business.

If most of your outbound communication (emails, facebook posts, postcards, newspaper ads, etc.) is about your products, your services, your promotions, or your store and not about what's interesting, helpful, useful, beneficial, or entertaining for your customer, then you are

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## **Continued from page 3**

making this marketing mistake.

### **#2. You Don't Track Your Results**

If you don't track the results of your marketing efforts it's impossible to tell if they are successful, or to what degree they are successful.

Of course, **tracking your results takes forethought and planning.** (See *Retail Marketing Mistake #7!*)

You have to be very clear about what your primary goals are for each of your marketing efforts - generate sales? Attract new customers? Re-activate inactive customers? Build relationships? What you hope to achieve affects the way you track your results and how you judge your success.

Some marketing results are easy to track, some are a bit more complicated, but it's always worth it. With marketing (as with almost every area of business), if you can measure it, you can manage it.

### **#3. You're a "One and Done" Marketer**

I can't tell you how many times I've had a great conversation with a retailer who's super excited to share a major marketing success and when I ask them, "So, when is the next one scheduled for?" they look at me like I have three heads.

Most of them honestly hadn't considered repeating their successful event!

Or here's what used to happen to me when I owned the Mackinaw Kite Co... We'd forget from year to year, month to month what we'd done and what worked. I'd find myself scratching my chin and saying, "Yeah, now I remember that thing we did last year. That was really great. Huh, wonder why we didn't do that again this year?"

One and done doesn't cut it. You spend too much time and effort getting your marketing

right to only do something one time. If it is successful keep on doing it again, and again, and again.

### **#4. You're Unhappy If It's Not a "Home Run"**

Hey, who doesn't like to hit a home run?! It's fun. The problem is that if you expect all your marketing efforts to be a home run, you're bound to be disappointed - and you might stop swinging the bat.

Most of your marketing efforts will be "singles." Not every email will get an 80% open rate. Not every in-store event will create a stampede of customers. Not every non-profit organization will be a top partner.

### **Celebrate your singles!**

It's the accumulation of lots of singles that will, in the end, cause you to win the game. Any good sports fan will tell you it's not the team with the most home runs that gets to the World Series.

Just keep hitting lots of singles and I guarantee you'll end up with a lot more "jingle" at the end of the year.

### **#5. You Don't Adapt Good Ideas**

There is no shortage of good - even *great* - ideas for attracting new customers, driving traffic, creating loyalty, increasing sales. But you may suffer from a lack of marketing imagination.

If you see an idea that's working for your colleagues in another industry, imagine all the possible ways you could adapt it for your business.

And don't just watch other retailers. Watch your local realtors, chiropractors, builders, manufacturers, car dealers, dentists, or anyone else you can lay your eyes on. You may find some marketing gold if you can adapt ideas from other kinds of businesses. How do you think banks, restaurants, and liquor stores all

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ended up with drive-thru windows?

While you're at it, don't forget to adapt your OWN good ideas!

If the '12 Days of Christmas' promotion worked for you, adapt and do a Spring Fling Deal of the Day during the week of spring break. Who said the concept had to be used only at Christmas? Who said it had to be 12 days long? Fashion week, Mother's Day, graduation, Father's Day, Back-to-School... what works for you?

Adapt!

After nearly every speech I give to a mixed industry group someone comes up to me and says, "I really loved your ideas for the pet store, but do you have any ideas for my bike shop?" Those store owners are making this retail marketing mistake and they are doomed if they can't adapt.

#### **#6. You Don't Pay Close Attention to the Details**

The nitty-gritty. The down-and-dirty. It's the execution of the details that will often make or break your marketing efforts.

Paying attention to the details is certainly what will take your retail marketing to the next level and is where you'll really maximize your efforts.

Here's a perfect example. My friend, Paul, just sent out his second email newsletter. It had a great subject line, really compelling content, and a strong call to action asking readers to pass it along to their friends. I thought my brother would find it interesting so I forwarded it, and that's when I noticed...

There was no place in the email where my brother could click to subscribe to the newsletter. AND Paul's website address wasn't hyperlinked in the email. Readers would have to copy/paste or manually type the web address into their browser bar to visit his site and sign up.

So while Paul's email accomplished the goal of strengthening existing relationship by delivering good content, he really missed a golden opportunity to build his list by not paying close attention to the details.

#### **#7. Your Marketing is Scattershot, Not Strategic**

You know who you are... you do a little bit of this, a little bit of that, and a little bit of the other. You try marketing tactic after tactic in hopes that some of your stuff will work.

Your marketing efforts spring from a need for cash, rather than from a thoughtful, well-designed strategic plan.

The good news here is if you try enough stuff, some of it **will** work. And if you repeat the stuff that works (see Retail Marketing Mistake #3), you'll start to get some traction. Activity and effort is way better than doing nothing.

But **strategic** activity and effort is lots, lots better.

When your marketing is based on a strategic plan, all of your tactics work together to enhance each other and achieve your overall goals. Each effort builds upon the other and the sum becomes greater than the parts.

And the cool thing is, strategic activity is not only more effective, it's easier. Better, easier - who doesn't love that?!

#### **So, how'd you do?**

Are you making any of these Retail Marketing Mistakes? If you are, don't get down on yourself. Almost everyone makes these mistakes from time to time. The question is...

#### ***What are you going to do about it?***

*Get FREE business building ideas delivered to your "inbox" every week. Sign up for your "WhizBang! Tip of the Week" at [www.WhizBangTraining.com](http://www.WhizBangTraining.com).*

# Happy Energy-Saving New Year!

## 2011 Planning for Retailers, Made Simple

Now that the hectic holiday season is over, Efficiency Vermont has a New Year's gift for you: A straight-forward way to plan cost-cutting, energy-saving store improvements in 2011. Getting started is as easy as 1-2-3:

1. Take a look at the below list of energy-saving actions for retailers.
2. Share this list with the folks who sell and/or service your store's lighting and equipment. Ask them what energy-saving improvements or replacements will be cost-effective for your store.
3. When you're ready to invest in new equipment, find out about rebates from Efficiency Vermont. Visit [www.encyvermont.com](http://www.encyvermont.com) to see what's eligible and to download a rebate application.

- **HEATING, VENTILATION & AIR CONDITIONING (HVAC)** – Energy savings are being found through the use of efficient equipment and properly-set controls. A service contractor can assure that HVAC controls are appropriately set to support a particular store's demands, taking into account such factors as building size and hours of operation.
- **REFRIGERATION** - By making improvements to existing equipment or by upgrading, stores selling cooled and/or frozen products are saving energy while increasing equipment reliability. Today's efficient technologies include energy-saving door heater controls, cooler doors, fan motors and motor controls, display case covers, compressors, and more.

Have questions? Need advice? Call Efficiency Vermont, toll-free: 888-921-5990.

### ENERGY-SAVING ACTIONS FOR RETAILERS

Here are typical ways that Vermont retailers are improving their stores, so that they can:

- reduce overhead and strengthen the bottom line with lower energy costs;
  - improve the look of products, with top-quality efficient lighting;
  - make a store comfortable for customers and staff, with efficient heating and cooling systems.
- **LIGHTING** – Lighting is a significant contributor to a retail store's energy costs, from product display and general overhead illumination to storeroom and restroom lighting. Efficient lights use less energy, provide quality light, enhance the appearance of merchandise, and come in styles that fit the look of any store. Lighting controls, such as occupancy sensors, allow store owners to automatically reduce lighting costs in infrequently-used areas.



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# Strong December Gains Help Retailers Beat Holiday Sales Projections, According to NRF

Even though consumers spent most of 2010 on the sidelines, retailers found a way to tap into pent up demand when it counted the most. According to the National Retail Federation, retail industry sales (which exclude automobiles, gas stations, and restaurants) for December rose 5.3 percent unadjusted year-over-year and 0.5 percent seasonally adjusted from November.

As a result, preliminary 2010 holiday sales, which combine the full months of November and December, rose 5.7 percent to \$462 billion, surpassing NRF's forecast of 3.3 percent. This represents the best holiday sales gain since 2004 when holiday sales increased 5.9 percent.

"In spite of weakness in employment and rising gas prices, consumers showed they still have spending power which helped retailers when it counted most," said NRF President and CEO Matthew Shay. "Retailers did a tremendous job planning for the season by managing inventory and hitting the right price points that helped them tap into pent up demand."

"While the worst appears to be behind us, we are not out of the woods yet," said NRF Chief Economist Jack Kleinhenz. "This latest step-up in growth is a spark for increased business spending and hiring."

December retail sales that were released by the U.S. Commerce Department show total retail sales (which include non-general merchandise categories such as autos, gasoline stations and restaurants) increased 0.6 percent seasonally adjusted over November and 8.3 percent unadjusted year-over-year.

Sales growth from November varied in

strength while year-over-year sales showed great strength. Sales at clothing and clothing accessory stores decreased 0.2 percent seasonally adjusted over last month but increased a solid 8.4 percent unadjusted year-over-year. Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores sales increased 0.4 percent seasonally adjusted month-to-month and 8.2 percent unadjusted year-over-year.

Though the US is still dealing with a weak housing environment, building material and garden equipment stores sales showed notable gains, increasing 1.9 seasonally adjusted over last month and a strong year-over-year growth of 12.0 percent.

Electronics and appliance stores sales decreased 0.6 percent seasonally adjusted over November but increased 1.4 percent unadjusted year-over-year. Sales at health and personal care stores increased 1.6 percent seasonally adjusted month-to-month and 7.2 percent unadjusted over December 2009.

*\*NRF classifies holiday sales as sales in the months of November and December.*

*(Courtesy NRF)*

## **VRA STAFF**

**R. Tasha Wallis**  
*Executive Director*

**Ceil Stryminski**  
*Membership Coordinator*

**Kate Kinney**  
*Bookkeeper*

# Beware of Purchasing Proprietary Credit Card Processing Terminals

When you purchase or lease a credit card processing terminal from your processor, make sure it is not a proprietary terminal **before** you sign a contract. A proprietary terminal can only be programmed to work with one or two specific processing companies. If you find better rates with another processor and wish to switch, you may have to purchase a new terminal and you may be out thousands of dollars.

To find out if the terminal you are about to purchase can only be programmed by one or two processors, research the terminal online or ask the processor you do business with whether it can be reprogrammed by other companies.

There are a few credit card processing terminals that can be easily reprogrammed no matter who the processor is, including the VeriFone Vx510 and the Hypercom Optimum T4210. Both terminals are available through RCSC, administrator of VRA's credit card processing program. Just call one of RCSC's processing experts, Michele or Nicholl, at (800) 442-3589 for more information.

**Let RCSC decode your credit card processing and unlock the savings!**

Enroll today and receive a free credit card processing terminal valued at \$400!\*

(Limited time offer through 1/21/2011)

\*Terms and Conditions apply. Please call for details. RCSC is a member of the Electronic Transactions Association.



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# “May You Live In Interesting Times”

Although this well-known quote supposedly comes from an ancient Chinese curse, there are plenty of arguments regarding the true origin of the line. It is true that retailers and everyone else who serve the needs of consumers are living in very interesting times as we enter the second decade of the century.

Increased consumer spending during the recent Christmas shopping season lent credence to the beginnings of economic recovery from the severe recession of the past two and a half years. Unfortunately, increased consumer spending did not benefit all areas of the country, all retail segments, or all retailers.

According to the [National Retail Federation's](#) most recent report on the Christmas shopping season, retail sales for November and December increased by a healthy 5.3 percent. The Christmas shopping season also saw some major changes in when and how major retailers ran promotions. Aggressive sales events started at the beginning of November and ran throughout the season. This induced the media to look at a longer length of the season rather than the four weeks before and the week after Christmas.

Most luxury goods retailers experienced healthy sales gains while many jewelers also enjoyed increases. But it looks like online merchants realized the largest gains. This trend certainly benefited multi-channel merchants many of whom offered shipping as late as Christmas week.

Among the best things to come out of this past, all-important Christmas shopping season in addition to better-than-expected sales results for many retailers was the way a growing number of merchants managed their inventories. This left savvy retailers with little excess merchandise to mark down after the holidays.

*Reprinted with permission, George Whalin's Retail Management E-Letter, January 2011*

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# FAQs 4-5-4 Calendar

## **When and why was the 4-5-4 Calendar created?**

The 4-5-4 Calendar, which is widely followed by retailers today, was derived in the 1930's during an informal inter-industry discussion. Prior to and during the 1930's, retailers used a straight calendar to report monthly sales. This calendar became problematic as Saturdays and Sundays became an increasingly large percentage of sales, since the number of weekends in a month varied year to year. A calendar that maintained the same number of weekends in comparable months was desired and the 4-5-4 Calendar was developed. Many stores began using the 4-5-4 Calendar in the 1940's.

## **What is the purpose of the 4-5-4 Calendar?**

The 4-5-4 Calendar serves as a voluntary guide for the retail industry and ensures sales comparability between years by dividing the year into months based on a 4 weeks – 5 weeks – 4 weeks format. The layout of the calendar lines up holidays and ensures the same number of Saturdays and Sundays in comparable months. Hence, like days are compared to like days for sales reporting purposes. The 4-5-4 Calendar also establishes Sales Release dates, which have historically been on the first Thursday following the month's end. In recent years, however, as the flow of information has improved, more companies are releasing sales data earlier in the week.

## **What is a 53-week year?**

Due to the layout of the 4-5-4 Calendar (52 weeks x 7 days = 364 days), which results in one remaining day each year, and the occurrence of Leap Year, it is sometimes necessary to add a 53rd week to the end of the calendar for sales reporting purposes only. This occurs approximately every five to six years, though this is not always the case. 1995, 2000, 2006, and 2012 are all 53-week years.

## **How does NRF determine the need for a 53rd week?**

If, after laying out the entire 52-week calendar for any given year, there are four or more days left in January during the 53rd week, then a 53rd week is added. For instance, if you look at the 4-5-4 Calendar for 2004-2006, you will see that in 2005 there were only three days remaining in January after the 52nd week (January 29-31). However, in 2006 there are four days remaining in January so a 53rd week is added on to the end of that year.

## **How are sales during a 53-week year compared to the subsequent year?**

For comparability purposes, the NRF 4-5-4 Calendar restates a 53-week year in the subsequent year (ex. 2006 is restated for comparability to 2007). This is accomplished by pushing each week of the 53-week year back one week, thereby ignoring the first week of the fiscal year (in this example, 2006). The benefit in doing so is to align holidays, which naturally account for a significant percentage of retailers' sales. The restatement is shown on the 2006-2008 4-5-4 Calendar. The first week of sales for 2006 begins on February 5, 2006 and ends on February 11, 2006 versus January 29 – February 4, 2006 on the 2005-2007 calendar. An alternative approach is to not restate and instead ignore the 53rd week of sales for comparability.

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You can find the latest edition of the 4-5-4 Calendar at: <http://www.nrf.com/4-5-4Calendar>

### **So, how important is it that you use the 4-5-4 calendar in your sales planning?**

Honestly, it depends on how much sales volume your store does and how big the difference is between your Saturday sales and your weekday sales.

Imagine a large department store chain like Macy's... let's say there are 50 stores in the chain and in an average store the sales volume difference between a regular weekday and a Saturday is \$20,000. (Not an unrealistic scenario.) That gives you a MILLION DOLLAR DIFFERENCE in sales between a 4 Saturday month and a 5 Saturday month.

For a business like this it is obviously very important to use a 4-5-4 calendar.

Now think about a smaller company with just one store. If the difference between Saturday sales and regular weekday sales is about \$1,000, that's not such a big deal.

Using the 4-5-4 calendar will always give you the most accurate forecasting, but for some smaller retailers the hassle of learning a new calendar system just may not be worth the benefit.

Larger stores, stores with a big difference between weekend and weekday sales, and multiple store chains will certainly benefit from smarter planning when using the 4-5-4 retail calendar!

*Courtesy WhizBang*

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## **It's Not Too Early...**

It's not too early to start thinking about this year's Retailer of the Year awards. Each year we choose a winner in one of each of these three categories:

- ◇ **Retailer of the Year**— honoring a Vermont retailer for overall excellence. Businesses nominated are judged using the following criteria: growth and stability; innovation; best management practices; community involvement.
  
- ◇ **Greentailer of the Year**—honoring a Vermont retailer for environmental excellence. Judging is based on commitment; innovation; and measurable results.
  
- ◇ **Community Gem**— honoring Vermont retailers that make unique and valuable contributions to their communities.

The nominees do not have to be a VRA member.

### **Who would you like to see win one of these awards?**

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# Secrets of Successful Marketing

*As an added service to VRA members, from now on we'll be offering in each newsletter a regular column by James Tabor, President of Gillen Tabor Communications, Inc. Jim's current and former clients for marketing and public relations have included IDX Corp., the State of Vermont, Burlington International Airport, the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, and many others. You can learn more about him and his services at [www.gillentabor.com](http://www.gillentabor.com).*

## Finding Your USPs

In our last newsletter column, I talked about the all-important USP—the Unique Selling Point that accomplishes two key goals. One, it distinguishes your business from the competition. Two, it highlights your product or service that customers should realize they can't live without. As excellent examples, I pointed out Subaru's "Beauty of All-Wheel Drive," and Allen Pools and Spas' "Where Vermont Goes to Relax."

Those USPs, of course, were already in use. In this column, I thought it would be helpful to talk about how you can identify *your* business's USPs. Below are three techniques that should prove helpful.

### 1. START WITH THE OBVIOUS

Some USPs are easier to spot than others. Maybe you're the only retailer of high-end kitchenware in your region. Perhaps your family has operated the business for five generations. That old saying about picking the low-hanging fruit first definitely applies here.

### 2. PICK YOUR NICHE

It's important to remember that you don't have to differentiate your business from *all* others—just those that are your competitors. You can start narrowing the field down by determining whether your business sells products, or services, or both. Your business may deal in products only—hardware, art supplies, and restaurant equipment, whatever. Similarly, you may offer only services: janitorial, instruction, kitchen remodeling, etc. Or you may offer some combination of both. Determining which of those three niches you occupy will make identifying a USP easier by shrinking the competition constellation

### 3. LISTEN TO YOUR CUSTOMERS

Feedback from your most faithful customers (sometimes called "apostles" by marketers) can be helpful. If they regularly rave about a special facet of your business, consider making that USP the centerpiece of some marketing. Say customers *love* the fact your sales associates put new windshield wipers on for them—right-now service can be a great USP. Maybe your beauticians know about the latest style trends before they appear in magazines and on TV. Staying *au courant* could become a USP. You get the idea.

### 4. AUDIT YOURSELF

We tend to flinch when we hear that word "audit" because of its IRS connections. But a marketing audit of your business can be very helpful in illuminating USPs that may not be so easy to identify. You can certainly retain an agency or consultant to perform a thorough marketing audit, but, like everything else, there are DIY possibilities here, too. We'll talk about them in the next column.

