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Return Fraud and Abuse: How to Protect Profits

By David Speights and Mark Hilinski

Fraudulent and abusive returners—camouflaged in the T-shirt and jeans uniform of the average shopper—are launching a multi-front attack on the retail industry. These secret operatives are draining \$16 billion annually (KingRogers International) from retailers' coffers and costing the average household of four \$225 per year. As executives and employees, we've been alerted to the enemy's presence, but we've lacked an effective counterattack—until now.

Approximately 9 percent of all returns in the United States are fraudulent, indicating an assault of staggering proportions. Discovering that their current return policies do nothing to stop most fraud and abuse has led many retailers to seek new protection tactics. While our adversary's arsenal contains many fraud and abuse schemes, new consumer-based return authorization systems allow retailers to intercept perpetrators before they have the opportunity to initiate a fraudulent or abusive return.

Return Fraud and Abuse Schemes

Although fraudulent and abusive return procedures are myriad, some schemes are more commonly used than others. Understanding these schemes, despite their ever-evolving nature, is the first step toward choosing the best defense.

Renting/Wardrobing

Renting/wardrobing begins with a legitimate merchandise purchase. The item is then used once or twice and returned as if it were new. The classic example is the purchase of an expensive cocktail dress for a wedding, reunion, or other special event. The consumer simply tucks the tags into the garment in an inconspicuous manner, dazzles partygoers with her finery, and then returns the dress for a full refund the following day, in essence having "rented" it for free.

This technique has spread to other valuable merchandise. When consumers buy durable goods, such as a camcorder to tape a graduation, a big screen

television to watch the Super Bowl, or a trendy watch to accessorize a job interview suit, and then return the items after using them, they are violating a retailer's traditional return policies. Unfortunately, the widespread notion that this is an acceptable behavior has only exacerbated its effects.

Receipt Fraud

Sales receipts can be used to defraud a retailer, and criminals have devised numerous avenues for obtaining them. Some thieves forge receipts, using computers and color printers. Sophisticated practitioners actually may obtain the retailer's paper stock from store contacts or paper suppliers in order to enhance the appearance of the counterfeit receipt. Others simply find receipts in store receptacles, shopping carts, or discarded shopping bags. Internet-savvy individuals may visit questionable web sites that purchase legitimate receipts and sell them to criminals who need a receipt for a particular item.

Regardless of how the receipt is acquired, it can be used for a novel type of fraud called *shoplisting* because

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VERMONT RETAIL ASSOCIATION



Nancy Foley


President's Corner

Do-It-Yourselfers Needed

We sometimes forget how unique Vermont is. We take for granted the fact that just about any Vermont citizen has many opportunities to speak directly with our Governor. I suspect that an audience with the top elected official of most states is not so readily had.

Many Vermonters complain about the high cost of health care, and it is a very serious issue. This summer features several opportunities for any Vermont citizen to step forward and, instead of merely complaining, offer thoughtful comments and concerns to the leaders of our state government on the subject. In other words, instead of just saying somebody ought to, we all have the chance to “do something about it.”

Several legislative committees are to hold public hearings on health care reform in coming months, with a schedule expected in the near future. In the meantime, Governor Douglas wants to hear from you. He is hosting a series of health care forums throughout the state with the next such event set for Wednesday, September 7, Lyndonville Fire Department, 318 Main Street, Lyndonville, VT. The Governor will continue forums as follows (specific locations to be determined): September 14 Rutland area, September 20 Central Vermont, September 29 Southeastern Vermont, and October 4 Northwestern Vermont. All forums run from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

Vermonters are renown for their practical sense and do-it-yourself attitudes. Regardless of your opinion on health care, now is the time for all of us to step forward and take part in the debate. 

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Final Scrutiny of “Vermont Origins” Rule

The Attorney General’s Office has now completed its work on CF120, the proposed Consumer Fraud rule that will govern use of the word “Vermont” on product labels. A copy of the final version of the rule, and other related information from the Attorney General, can be viewed at <http://www.atg.state.vt.us/display.php?smod=176>.

The Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR) will be holding its “legislative review” hearing on the rule on Wednesday, September 7, 2005, starting at 9:30 a.m., in Room 10 of the Vermont State House in Montpelier. LCAR has set aside a limited amount of time for this meeting. The issues LCAR is statutorily authorized to consider are limited to whether an agency has observed rule-making procedures, whether the rule is within the authority granted by a statute, and so on — not whether a proposed rule is good or bad policy.

However, there may still be some chance of an opportunity to voice concerns over the rule during the LCAR hearing. Anyone wishing to address the rule before LCAR must first call LCAR’s Clerk, Katie Pickens, at (802) 828-5760. All members of the public are permitted to attend and observe the hearing. 

Retailers Ask

Q. How long should a merchant keep their credit card receipts?

A. MasterCard requires you to keep receipts for 18 months,* while Visa requires retention for 12 months.**

*March 2005 MasterCard Merchant Rules Manual § 2.12.2.

**2004 Card Acceptance and Chargeback Management Guide for Merchants p. 53.



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Return Fraud (Cont. from page 1)

it works much like a shopping list. The individual enters a store with the receipt in hand and proceeds with one of two scenarios: 1) Pick up the item[s] listed on the paper and head to the returns counter, or 2) shoplift the item[s] and come back at another time to conduct the fraudulent return. Shoplifting enables the petty thief to eliminate the middleman, someone who will buy the stolen merchandise. Instead, this individual is essentially selling the product back to its owner, the retail store. This method has become the province of the less criminally inclined because it has shed its dark alley aura through some quick computer work and a daylight trip to the store.

Price Arbitrage

Criminals with working capital—called *go money*—can engage in several types of price manipulation. One example occurs when an individual purchases two similar items with different retail prices. By repackaging the cheaper item in the expensive item's box and returning it for a full refund, the fraudulent returner has basically stolen the better item. This is particularly effective with electronics because cheap units often resemble expensive ones. Selling the more expensive item online, even at a discount, adds dollars to the criminal's pocketbook.

Other forms of price arbitrage include switching boxes in the store to purchase a higher-priced item for less or purchasing an item at a discount and returning it for a full price refund. Regardless of the fraudulent returner's approach, the retailer pays the difference.

A recent *eWeek* article (January 5, 2005) describes a price arbitrage scheme committed by one group at Wal-Mart stores that cost the retailer a total of \$1.5 million across 19 states. The group switched the bar codes from low-priced items to high-priced items before the purchase. Then the group removed the phony bar code and returned the item to obtain the full price as store credit, cash, or a gift card.

Check Fraud

Abusers who practice theft for a living are drawn to the world of bank accounts, preferably a false one or perhaps yours. They purchase merchandise with an illegitimate check or with one backed by insufficient funds and then return the merchandise before the check clears the bank. Here the retailer is simply handing over its profits to the unscrupulous among us. One retailer reported that recent investigations uncovered check fraud rings that wrote a suspected \$100,000 in bad checks to that retailer and more than \$450,000 to other retailers.

Returning Stolen Merchandise

Profiting from stolen merchandise, one of the many ways to defraud retailers, has many faces. Small-time criminals may steal merchandise themselves or buy it directly from the thief. They then return it to the store for a full cash refund, either with a forged, found, or purchased receipt or without a receipt at all, depending on the store's return policy. More complex forms of this scheme entail stealing entire truckloads of merchandise and distributing them to a ring of criminals who will return the items to different retail outlets in a large geographic area. In essence, the store is buying the merchandise twice, first from the manufacturer and secondly from the thief.

A *Washington Post* article (January 6, 2005, Page A⁰¹) detailed a scheme in which shoplifters returned merchandise without a receipt, obtained store credit, and sold the store credit online for 76 cents on the dollar.

Employee Fraud

Employees have the necessary insider information to conduct endless retail frauds. Acting alone or in collusion, they are uniquely positioned to cause significant financial damage in a relatively short period. Some employees act as facilitators, leaving back doors open or making loading docks accessible; some provide sales receipt paper stock; some actually execute the return transaction for their co-conspirators. The insidious nature of employee fraud can be debilitating if left unchecked.

Many Fronts of Return Fraud and Abuse

Renting/wardrobing, with nearly 52 percent of total return fraud and abuse, is the most aggressive attack on retailers' profit margins. But each fraudulent or abusive return, regardless of its form, contributes to the substantial losses retailers sustain annually. The widespread nature of return fraud and abuse reinforces the need for a focused defense strategy.

Traditional Return Policy vs. Consumer-Based Systems

Most traditional return policies do not consider who is making a return. Simple facts, such as the presence of a receipt, the age of the receipt, and the word of the consumer that the product is unused, are sufficient for a return. Some of the more advanced traditional systems check the validity of the receipt by using receipt reconciliation. Verifying the authenticity of the receipt, however, reduces the problem of receipt forgery, which is estimated to be a smaller fraction of all return fraud and abuse. Unfortunately, traditional systems do little or nothing to stop the fraud and abuse schemes described in this article; hence, the emergence of

consumer-based systems.

A consumer-based system tracks each consumer's behavior and identifies aberrant patterns to flag likely fraud and abuse. Fraudulent and abusive returners make many returns, and the system detects them before they inflict too much damage. This system typically allows a retailer to extend a more liberal return policy to the majority of consumers but use a more focused policy for problem consumers.

Financial Casualties Caused by Consumer Returns

Clearly, returns cause the retailer to lose the profit margin earned on the original sale. The monetary drain, however, does not end there. Additional losses accrue when you factor in the time employees spend processing returns, evaluating the item's resale potential, and restocking the returns. When an item must be discounted or, even worse, discarded after a return, it further compounds the company's losses. Then, of course, there are the administrative expenses of accounting for returns and managing the entire return system. For mass merchandisers and nationwide chains, the industrywide costs can reach hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

As a result of the aforementioned expenses, our experience indicates that an individual consumer with a long-term pattern of return rates greater than 20 to 30

percent negatively affects operating profit.

Even at a 20 percent return rate, the retailer sees zero profit. In addition, as a retailer's gross margins fall, the breakeven return rate also falls. The obvious implication is that profitability is directly connected to return rate.

Countering Return Fraud

Return policies once were a point of differentiation—Nordstrom would take back any item at any time in any condition while a mom-and-pop operation said all sales were final—but with return fraud reaching nearly 9 percent of returned merchandise dollars, return policies need to be scrutinized. Curbing return fraud can be critical to cutting expenses and improving the bottom line. The question is no longer *if*, but *how*.

The responsibility of managing the return policy for a retailer may not always be clearly defined. Different teams within the organization, each having separate goals, may share part of the burden. Centralizing the return authorization function within a consumer-based system, however, can assist in organizing the management of a return policy. Such a system can assist in quick ad-hoc analyses of the impact of any proposed changes on the consumer.

See "Return Fraud" page 6



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Return Fraud (Cont. from page 5)

Computer technology can track consumer return behavior, using objective criteria. Working from a centralized location to deny returns to systematic fraudsters is now possible. For example, The Return Exchange system uses the swipe of a driver's license or other government issued ID cards to collect information on each consumer. By eliminating the dependence on a store associate to manually enter information, the system records more accurate data. Using the data collected, statistical fraud detection models are developed to identify common patterns of fraud and abuse. The models are consistently applied to every consumer, which eliminates the variables of sales staff subjectivity and potential discrimination. Retailers can focus on specific fraudulent returners to stop the financial drain.

When reviewing the common return fraud and abuse schemes, most retailers discover that their current return policies do nothing to prevent them. For example, a consumer who purchases clothes every Sunday and returns them the following Sunday every week for a year is not violating most return policies. Retailers who wish to fight costly fraud must focus on the consumer's return patterns, i.e., pinpointing the abusive consumer to prevent the fraudulent return transaction.

Allaying Concerns about a Consumer-Focused Strategy

Management may voice concerns about replacing a traditional return policy with a consumer-level return authorization system. They may argue that tracking individual consumers rather than using blanket return procedures may drive consumers away. However, our research shows that approximately 75 percent of all shoppers never return purchases. Of the remaining 25 percent that do return items, only 1 to 2 percent are netted for fraud or abuse because an effective return authorization system denies returns to only the worst offenders. The other 98 to 99 percent of consumers are unaffected. In contrast, most traditional return policies can adversely affect up to 15 percent of return consumers.

The final question retailers pose is: "What happens to a consumer's shopping behavior following a denial?" Using a controlled sample that analyzed shopping patterns before and after a denial on the same consumers, we found two significant facts:

- (1) The shopping patterns of 35 to 40 percent of consumers who experience a return denial are not affected afterward.
- (2) Within 60 days of a denial, on average, net sales for all denied consumers resume their pre-denial levels.

Thus, while denying a consumer may generate some short-term effects, eventually the consumer is rehabilitated

into a more profitable consumer, which is the desired end result. Another concern involves the privacy of the consumer's data; retailers think consumers might be leery of handing over personal information to facilitate a return.

Retailers can allay these fears by instituting a formal privacy policy and setting up a call center that allows consumers to obtain a copy of their activity report and to dispute inaccuracies, similar to a credit reporting agency.

Deterrence

A consumer-based authorization system can also deter potential fraudulent returners. Once return abusers realize that the retailer will not tolerate abusive or fraudulent return behavior, they will search for a softer target. In fact, return rates have dropped following installation of a prevention system but before the issuance of any denials. Would-be criminals simply go elsewhere when they recognize that they cannot perpetrate fraud and abuse schemes.

Efficacy

The true test of a return authorization system is the number of unprofitable consumers to whom it denies returns compared to the number of profitable consumers it allows to make returns.

Note that as the consumer population approaches

Top Ten Signals of Return Fraud

Return policies are affecting your competitive position if your...

1. Return rate is above the average return rate for your direct competitors.
2. Shrink rate is larger than the average shrink rate for your direct competitors.
3. Return rate has increased in two of the last three years.
4. Return policies are based on subjective intuition and do not measure the impact on consumers.
5. Return policies are arbitrary with respect to a consumer's loyalty or profitability.
6. Return policy has not been reviewed in the last 12 months.
7. Return policy has not changed significantly in the last three years.
8. Return policies are not enforced uniformly throughout the stores.
9. Average markdown rates following a return are increasing.
10. Percentage of returned merchandise you are able to resell has declined.

profitability for the retailer, there are fewer and fewer incidences of return denial, so that eventually only unprofitable consumers are denied their abusive or fraudulent returns. Reducing the number of unprofitable consumers leads to an improvement in a retailer's operating profits.

Benefits for Retailers and Consumers

Many retailers are moving toward a consumer-based return system as a way to dramatically improve their bottom line. According to our internal studies, just a small improvement in the average retailer's return rate, e.g., falling from 10 to 9 percent, could mean an improvement in operating margins of between 4 and 6 percent. One retailer in particular demonstrated more than a 10 percent drop in return rates year-over-year using a consumer-based system.

Another study revealed a 15 percent reduction in shrink rates at a large retailer in the six months following implementation of our system. Arguably, few areas of retail diligence can bring such rapid financial improvement to the bottom line.

Return authorization provides additional benefits for retailers by allowing them to:

- Model consumer return behavior
- Change return policies according to the competitive

environment

- Protect against fraudulent and abusive returns
- Deter employee-assisted inventory shrinkage
- Consistently apply operational procedures
- Utilize fact-based data to make informed decisions

A fact-based return authorization system helps consumers as well as retailers. Consumers benefit from the objectivity of the system. They know the store's return policy is free from personal bias or preference. Furthermore, consumers enjoy more lenient return policies at retailers that target only fraudulent and abusive returns.


Strategy for the Future

Of course, management teams want to know the metrics derived from studies of a consumer-based return authorization system. They are:

- Decline in the return rate
- Increase in operating profit
- Decrease in inventory shrinkage

These metrics continue to show material, favorable movement in the battle against return fraud. In short, a protection system makes it possible to defeat return fraudsters who are decimating retailers' profit margins.

Courtesy: David Speights and Mark Hilinski, Return Fraud and Abuse: How to Protect Profits, Retailing Issues Letter, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Center for Retailing Studies, Texas A&M University, July, 2005)



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VRA Member: *Battenkill Sports, Manchester, VT*

Battenkill Sports is a bicycle shop in Manchester, Vermont owned by Robin and Amy Verner (a VRA member for over 30 years). VRA recently interviewed co-owner Amy. Amy is a League Cycling Instructor (“LCI”) of the League of American Bicyclists and also sits on the Board of Directors of the Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition.

How long has *Battenkill Sports* been in business?

Since 1972.

Some folks have good stories about how they ended up in retail – what’s your story?

My husband was going to start a marina on Lake St. Catherine or Lake Bomoseen and we went up and looked at property and realized we didn’t have enough working capital. We talked to a marina owner who said “you really should go into the bike business, this is the boom of the 10-speed.” Of course, he didn’t want us to be his competition, so he suggested another business. And I would say within probably the next 10 days we owned a bicycle shop.

Were you avid cyclists?

Yes and we had just purchased 10-speed bicycles which we tried to buy in Vermont. We had to go to New Jersey to purchase them because you couldn’t get them, they were just that hot. They sold me a bike that was too large for me and I already knew that we weren’t going to be those type of retailers.

What do you like most about being a retailer?

That’s a difficult one.

Should I first ask what you like least?

That I don’t get enough biking in because we have to work so hard when it’s biking weather. But we have met our best friends through the shop and we have friends in all different states and they are still buying from us.

The shop is adjacent to your home?

Yes, it’s right on the property. It was really good that I could go to work and bring up two children.

Has living next to your storefront ever had some odd consequences?

It was great when the kids were growing up, but now that they’re grown up and gone I can’t be in the garden on a day off because customers come right over.

Has anybody ever banged on your door at 11:00 o’clock at night?

We had someone trying to get in at 1:30 in the morning

because they had to get their bike before travelling to Boston.

What has changed the most about retail business since you began over 30 years ago?

Hours are getting longer, more people are riding more than ever.

Ever thought about expanding and opening another store?

We have but this business is so labor intensive because we’re not just taking a product out of a box and putting it on a shelf. We have to assemble, fit, warranty, and maintain our products. And we have to stock so many parts for service. It would be too difficult.

You probably have more in common with car dealerships than many retailers.

Very labor intensive.

What’s the most expensive bicycle you ever sold?

Probably \$6,000 or so, not too long ago.

Has the Internet affected your business, for good or bad?

Our customers are more knowledgeable. The Internet has changed our business and customers come in looking for the newest things. People really study what they’re looking to buy.

It looks like you have donated bikes to causes over the years.

Quite a few years ago we got involved with the Food Cupboard. When people come and trade bikes in, instead of buying them from our customers and having to fix them up to resell them, we decided to do a bicycle swap which is now called Deals on Wheels. People bring their bikes in, we help them decide what the bike is worth, and at the end of the day if we sell their bike they have to donate \$5 to the Food Cupboard. Every year we raise \$1,200 to \$1,400 through used bike sales. It’s described on www.battenkillsports.com.

Is Manchester’s nature as a tourist and outlet

shopping destination a challenge for you?

People that come to Manchester to go shopping don't just drop in to our shop.

You're an accomplished Trek dealer and I'd be remiss if I didn't ask if you've met Lance Armstrong.

I am involved in cycling advocacy and our involvement got us into a drawing. I won and received one of his shirts and got to talk to him for a few minutes. I have a picture of myself with him hanging in the shop.

What's the furthest you've ever bent over backward to meet a customer's special request?

I think probably a lot of times what happens is people think that they're buying the only bike in their lifetime and they just have to make sure they are buying the correct bike and they put you through everything under the sun to make sure it's the best bike that's out there. They want to spend \$500 or less and you probably put \$700 worth of labor into it.

Sounds like a great business.

You want to buy it?

When will you get to start riding a bike again?

We do have Thursday and Friday night rides. We are starting to become involved in bike travel. Our customers have always said they would love to cycle with us. Now we're going to plan trips and call them and I hope they're going to jump at the chance and when we get back some will want to buy bikes they rode on the trip. We're going to go to warm places in the winter when our shop is not that busy.

Do you generally follow politics beyond biking-specific issues?

I don't know if I really want to go there. I love living in this State and I've lived here since 1970 when my husband brought me here. A lot of things have changed. It's hard being in business and looking at environmental problems, zoning problems that we have, but I think we've done a good job.

Is the 1% local option sales tax in Manchester a problem for you?

It is but we're still lower than New York. We don't get as many people from Massachusetts as we used to get because of our sales tax. But if you give good service, you can't just think about doom and gloom that you're not going to have that customer. You can make that person who walks in a customer if you have a good

attitude and you provide better service than a shop where the sales tax is lower. If your service exceeds the cost of that 1%, they'll buy from you.

**You've been in business over 30 years. What advice do you have for new retailers?**

We should have been out of business. My husband earning a paycheck as a teacher kept us going a few times. We tried to go into business selling cross country skis when we first started out. We had a very warm winter and we lost our shirts and should have been out of business. We were young enough and sold off all the ski equipment and decided just to do bikes. That's why the name of the shop is Battenkill Sports because we thought we would be doing more than one thing and we've been doing just bicycles ever since. It's really a year round business and we're there 7 days a week all year.


One nugget of advice?

We were undercapitalized, don't start out that way. You're going to need more than you think to get through bad months.

Any final thoughts?

We love Vermont and that's why we're still here. We're pretty optimistic about it. As my husband says, doing business here, if you want to make a million bring 2 million with you.

You don't get big profits but you get something else?

Quality of life. You go to the supermarket, you know most of the people in there. That's still a nice thing. People are very friendly and I think Manchester has maintained that. 

Small Retailers Must Source, Sell Unique Products

In order to source those unique products that make a small store stand out, independent retailers must join national buying groups, establish credibility with an anchor brand, and develop a web site that catches the attention of vendors.

While it's not easy to find new sources of merchandise, it is vital if small retailers are to succeed in today's highly competitive industry, according to a new white paper that examines the challenges and opportunities for small independent merchants.

"Most retailers don't understand the problems associated with product sourcing and acquisition. Most people don't understand it," said Jim Baum, a third-generation owner of several small retail businesses in Morris, IL. "But small, independent retailers have to use sources that big stores don't. There has to be a differentiation."

Faced with more competitors, Internet-powered consumers and fewer old-world vendors, many independent retailers are struggling just to stay in business. Several trends affecting retailers include the increasing amount and intensity of competition, the aging of America, the growing Hispanic population and soaring healthcare costs. Small independent merchants need to set themselves apart from the competition if they are to survive these trends.

Bob Benham, owner of a single-location women's fashion specialty store in Oklahoma City upgraded the quality of his merchandise so he wouldn't have to compete against traditional department stores. In the process, his store became more exclusive, so Benham started going after European lines.


"We felt we had to have a very clear niche and purpose in the marketplace," Benham said. "Everything here has to have emotional content – that's what our customers are looking for. That's how we train our buyers – to look for things with emotional content, something you are going to respond to, react to and love."

The key for Benham's business was to get a couple of breakthrough lines that gave them credibility with other

vendors. The store's website was the key because it was able to portray the store's image visually and instantly.

Ron Romero, president of an independent TV and appliance store in Lincoln, NE, joined a large buying group in the early 1980s. It allows his store to have programs with major manufacturers who treat his store as though it was a national account. It puts parity into pricing and makes more lines available to the independent store.

A furniture, appliances and home electronics store in Bakersfield, CA, set itself apart from the competition by promoting itself as three distinct businesses, store vice president Steve Illingworth said. A knowledgeable staff and installation services add value to the products at Big Screen City, Sofas Etc., and The Appliance Center.

"We have grown profitably because we saw the coming demand. When you start to see sales and profits go down, you've got to find other products and better ways," Illingworth said. 

Vermont's New Gift Certificate/ Gift Card Law: The Basics

- 2005 Act No. 39 – Effective July 1, 2005
- Applies to gift cards and gift certificates.
- Requires minimum 3-year expiration date.
- After expiration, "unused portion shall be returned to the holder if requested." *Note:* Providing the holder with a new gift certificate/card for remaining value may be sufficient, although the law is not clear on this point.
- Certificates/cards without specified expiration date do not expire.
- Prohibits dormancy, maintenance, and other such fees.
- When remaining value falls below \$1.00, holder may request balance for cash.

VTstores.com: Are Internet Shoppers Browsing Your Store?

Do you know what happens if you type “Vermont stores” into an Internet search engine like Google or Yahoo? Shoppers looking for a place to find products or services from a Vermont retailer might try just such an Internet search or something like it. And if they do, one of the top search results (if not the very top result) will be for the website www.VTstores.com, a site owned and operated by VRA.

VTstores.com is a one-stop Internet directory listing VRA member stores, many with links to VRA members’ own websites. VRA advertises vtstores.com in various ways, and there is even a link to vtstores.com on the State’s tourism website, www.vermontvacation.com. By listing your store on VTstores.com, you can reach potential customers looking for an easy way to find Vermont retail shops on the Internet.

But do Internet users actually visit the VTstores.com website? Yes. VRA tracks usage of the site and, in July 2005 for example, 1010 unique visitors to the site viewed 7364 web pages. That’s 1000 shoppers per month browsing VRA members’ stores online!

Here is the best news: having a listing/link to your business on VTstores.com is FREE with your VRA membership! No website? No problem — VRA can either list simple contact information about your store on VTstores.com or we can create a basic web page for you. The cost to you is the same either way: Zero.

If you are not taking advantage of this member benefit but would like to, fill-out a vtstores.com application online at www.VTretailers.com or contact our office and we will send you an application form. **VRA**



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