



Common Sense

Customer Service

"There is only one boss: the customer. And he can fire everybody in the company, from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else."

SAM WALTON, FOUNDER OF WAL_MART

What Customers Want

"Knowing what customers want to buy, why they want to buy, and when they want to buy is behind every successful retailer/consumer relationship," explains customer retention consultant Schwabe. Those words are music to Brian McInerney's ears. Founder of Wheel Fun Rentals, a recreational rental franchise based in Santa Barbara, Calif., McInerney discovered the what, why and when before launching his business.

His primary customers are baby boomers with children. Unabashedly nostalgic and a boomer himself, McInerney says, "I'm into fun. How many of us remember that we used to ride bikes just to have fun?" Wheel Fun caters to customers who want to relive a moment in childhood while introducing their own children to the world of carefree biking. With that in mind, McInerney positioned his franchise locations inside state parks, on seaside boardwalks, and in resort locations--a strategy designed to lure customers when they are in a relaxed and fun-oriented mood already.

Wheel Fun is riding on the crest of more than a few overarching retailing trends. The 77 million baby boomers are the market to reach, says Sanford Stein, a Minneapolis, Minn.-based retail trends predictor and analyst. "We're talking about a market that resembles a VW in a snake," he says. And they make buy decisions based on their characteristics as a group. "They are self-indulgent, big spenders, love vacations, prefer retro to new, adore having fun, and are addicted to small indulgences."