

Hosting Shopping Parties

By Glenda Polak

Living in Alberta, the winters can be long and cold so last January my friend and I decided to host a special event at Caprice. We called it "Releasing your Inner Diva." My store is on two floors and at that time the upstairs was not being used for retail so I brought in round tables, chairs, candles, etc. to create some ambience. Linda (my friend, the Diva teacher) spoke to the audience for about 45 minutes and although it was informational it was mostly humor and motivational. The audience LOVED it and the surveys they filled out told us loud and clear that they wanted more of these events. After the talking part was over, everyone went downstairs to shop. Wine, non-alcoholic beverages and snacks were served on both floors.

The event was so well received that we hosted a 2nd one two weeks later with great success. These two events helped boost sales during January—normally a slow time—by close to \$3,000.

After that the idea of regular shopping parties was born. I hosted the first one in June and had one every month after that except August. Those six parties brought in an additional \$13,500 of revenue! Well worth the effort. In addition to that revenue from the parties was the extra sales generated from the shopping trips to Caprice that these women now make more frequently because they think of the store more often. I hold the parties on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday evenings from 6 to 10 PM.



There are so many things you can do at a shopping party; these are some of the things I've done:

- ★ Certified massage therapist gives free mini-massages. We called it a div-assage!
- ★ Cosmetic store does free make-overs. Of course, this also helped promote her business.
- ★ An informal fashion show. Customers modeled five to six different outfits during the party. They carry cards detailing the cost of the outfit, designer, size, etc. Sales have increased dramatically since we started doing that, plus the women love to model.
- ★ I give the models a 15% discount the night of the party which usually brings in \$750 - \$1000. Customers love to see the clothes being modeled by 'real' women. I use all shapes, sizes and ages. Have the models come in the week prior to the party to be fitted.
- ★ Door prizes and/or give-aways. A cosmetic sales rep donated freebies I used as gifts for everyone at the party.
- ★ An Image Consultant worked at four of the parties helping customers choose outfits flattering to their body shape.
- ★ We always celebrate our shoppers birthday month. The birthday shoppers receive a rousing rendition of 'Happy Shopping to You' and a small gift from the store. Again, just more fun things you can do that create good memories for the shoppers but do not cost you anything.
- ★ The last two parties I've worked with a female comedian who is a shop-o-holic—she was a huge hit! She has recently published a book and did her book launch at one of my parties and did a thirty minute comedy routine at the 2nd one. I'm working with her on an on-going basis. She has a line of clothes that she has designed herself, so I've given her a small space in the store for display in return for her giving me free comedy work. It is a wonderful fit for my store.

★ I'm currently working on a 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun' Shopping/PJ party. There is a delightful Bed & Breakfast across the street from my store and I'm talking to the owners about working with them on this event. I'm considering holding a typical shopping party at the store and then we would go over to the B & B and change into our PJ's. There is a large parlor that we could use for entertainment and I would give prizes for the best pajamas based on some theme such as shopping, diva etc. The other title I might use is 'Because you're worth it!'

Yes, this is a lot of work, but the more you do it the easier it becomes. Right now I buy the wine, other beverages and food that I serve but I plan to contact local liquor stores and catering firms to see if they would be interested in partnering with me as a way of promoting their business.

I try to have at least five staff members working during the parties. We changed the upstairs to retail last June so I have two staff work upstairs, two downstairs and the fifth one works exclusively with the models helping them get changed and hanging up their clothes. I often have a friend or customer make sure the beverages and food trays are full. Attendance varies from 15 to 60, BUT even when only 15 people attended, sales were \$1800, because it was the right 15! Use your customer list for invitations because they are your captive audience. I put up posters in the store advertising the parties but I've never put a paid ad in local papers. I want the '5 star' shoppers at the party as that is who we are catering to. I don't offer any special sales or discounts at the party. Women come to it for the experience . . . to have fun with their friends. .

I take lots of pictures at the parties and always have duplicates made so the next time customers are in the store I can give them a copy of their photos. One set goes in a special store album that is on display for people to look through. I'm considering doing a 'wall of shoppers' or something similar, but don't really want to give up wall space I could use for selling.

Benefits to the store are many:

- ◆ Customers bring their 'shopper' friends with them so we are always 'growing' with new shoppers.
- ◆ Shoppers do not come to every party, they have a life too plus with over 600 on our mailing list, we would be in serious trouble if they all attended. Most come every two or three months but by holding it monthly we maintain that extra cash flow.
- ◆ The parties are held during times the store is normally closed but I pay rent 24 hours a day so any revenue I bring in during 'closed' times is a bonus.
- ◆ Staff love working at the parties, they are always disappointed if they are not scheduled so they bring a friend and shop.
- ◆ During the shopping parties, other customers will compliment women they don't know on how great an outfit looks on them. Customers become the best salespeople.
- ◆ Customers leave saying how much fun they had, thanking us for the great party and for inviting them and this is after they've spent a couple of hundred dollars. Gotta love it! They are buying the experience and they like it.
- ◆ Networking opportunities to work with other businesses that have a similar target audience. I can tap into their customers and like-wise.

Lastly... Great word of mouth about the store!!!

Glenda Polak owns *Caprice Resale Consignment* in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Well known for her creative shopping parties, Glenda presented a workshop on the topic at NARTS Conference 2006.