



By Tracy True Dismukes

Having a tough time deciding on a location? The number one most important thing to look for is this:

Locate your store where people (specifically your target customers) are already in the habit of parking their cars and running in to other places to take care of errands or other business. Get in the middle of the customer flow, don't try to get the flow to move to you.

If you can keep this one point in mind, you will save yourself a fortune in advertising and stress to get people to come to your business.

You'll notice lots of destination locations that have been around for 20 years and are doing a great business. Do you have 20 years to build up to that level? Or would you rather get a jump-start by having instant customers because they happened to be there anyway?

Maybe you are considering locating in a Wal-Mart shopping center. Almost everybody goes to Wal-Mart so that has to be a great place to locate your business right? Maybe, maybe not. The same rules apply. Go to the shopping center and watch the customer flow. Most of the time, the shopper going to Wal-Mart is not going to browse around the shopping center. They are on a mission. It takes a lot to muster up the energy for a Wal-Mart trip—especially the super-centers. They have to gear themselves up to walk around a huge store, focus on what they need, face the distractions of all the things they didn't know they wanted 'til they got there, screaming children, crowded aisles, realizing they spent more than they meant to and then finding their car in a sea of SUVs, loading up the car with 20 bags of 'stuff' and then finding a place to stick the shopping cart. Add kids to the mix and they just want to get home. You will have a really tough time attracting that shopper to your store. And if they have to move their car to get to you, forget it.

Now, if there are other stores in the center that are drawing your type of customer, that may indicate a potential hot spot. Look for complementary businesses in a close proximity (walking distance) to each other. If your potential customer can PARK ONCE and knock out several errands in one trip, you have the makings of a good location.

Case in point. One of our stores is in an older strip that is currently undergoing renovation. Earlier this year, the grocery store anchor moved out after 25 years in the same location. Too many new grocery stores moved in around it and it finally became too much competition for them. You would think that would be the death of the connecting strip center. Quite the contrary—nobody moved out or closed and most of the tenants saw

steady business throughout the vacancy of the grocery store. In our strip is our ladies consignment shop which includes furniture, bridal and our plus size store beside it. Next to us is a locally owned drug store, gift shop, 2 hair salons, nail salon, \$1.95 cleaners, baby furniture store, Greek restaurant/grill, real estate office, and gift basket shop. All stores are small businesses, no chains (except ours, but still locally owned) and no franchises. There is a free standing bank in the parking lot. They can PARK ONCE and knock out almost all their errands.

After 6 months of vacancy, there is an expensive furniture store moving into the grocery store location next month and the whole strip is in the middle of a facelift. Not only did all the tenants hold their own in terms of sales, we are the reason the landlord was able to attract this large furniture store to our center. We had a strong customer base and the furniture store wanted in. They moved to where the customers already were. Now guess who is going to benefit from all THEIR advertising and grand opening sales....US!

Second case in point. Our newest store is on the wrong end of a Wal-Mart shopping center. It is beautiful, the clothes are top notch, the sales staff is trained, all systems are in place, but no foot traffic. It is tucked in between a bike shop and a popular Mexican restaurant. We selected the location because everyone in the surrounding area came to that new Wal-Mart Supercenter, we went to that restaurant next door at least once a week, the neighborhoods surrounding the store have high incomes, there were always a million cars in the parking lot, and it was the only space left in the center—sounds perfect!

The location has proven to be so-so because there are no other businesses around us that pull in our specific customer base (that are in the mood to shop) other than us. The other end of the center has a beauty supply, gift store, SteinMart, hair salon, nail salon, tanning salon, Hallmark store, Catherine's Plus Sizes and more. Busy women can PARK ONCE and hit them all, but they usually aren't going to move their car to the far end of the center just for us. It's too much trouble.

**Make it easy for them to come shop with you.
Let them just PARK ONCE.**

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