



# STARS Newsletter

South Texas Association of Resale Shops  
visit us at: [www.starresale.com](http://www.starresale.com)

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## BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY

A big part of customer service is common sense. The biggest mistake you can make—which will cost you loyalty—is to stick to your rules no matter what. Also, be ready to admit any mistake you or your company may have made. If customers see that you are willing to admit a mistake, they are more likely to accept responsibility for their actions and it may calm down a confrontation.

Remember, most customers are nice, like you, and don't want to take advantage of you. They will more likely remember how you handled the problem and not the problem.

Speaking to customers on the phone is a great opportunity to build relationships. While looking up information, continue to engage them in personal conversation and encourage them to come in soon for a visit.

**These tips come from marketing expert Debra J. Schmidt. Learn more at her website, [www.theloyaltyleader.com](http://www.theloyaltyleader.com)**

## Mark Your Calendars



### Spring 2008

Next printing and distribution of the STARS official Directory

### April 1, 2008

Next mail out of the STARS Newsletter.

### June 27-30, 2008

NARTS Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. Visit their website [www.narts.org](http://www.narts.org) for complete information.

### *The Official STARS Directory News*

Yolanda and Jacke wish to announce that they are revamping the Directory to make it more attractive and more affordable to our members. The Directory will also go to a once-a-year publication to be scheduled in the spring of each year. We urge every member to be represented! Look for information about this new directory coming soon!

Why advertise in the Directory? There are two big reasons: 1. Not only do advertisers get the number of directories they want, but also STARS distributes thousands more through its PR efforts. 2. Members find it so much easier to do referrals to other STARS stores.

Not sure you are receiving a real benefit by being in the directory? Well, consider that the directory is available somewhere year-round, and will cost about as much as a couple of newspaper ads that will be thrown in the trash the next day.

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## About STARS...

The STARS Newsletter is published bi-monthly 6 times a year for Feb/Mar, April/May, June/July, Aug/Sept, Oct/Nov and Dec/Jan and is mailed to STARS members, prospective members and other interested persons.

STARS was founded in 1991 to promote education, networking, mentoring and co-op advertising among member for-profit resale shops.

Membership in STARS is open to for-profit resale shops in South Texas. Membership dues are only \$50 per year. New members pay a mandatory one time listing fee of \$50 to be included on the STARS website, [www.starsresale.com](http://www.starsresale.com). A STARS member may link their shop website to their STARS listing at any time for a one-time fee of \$50. Contact STARS at 713-789-6456.

How to join STARS: Go on-line to the STARS website and click on "Membership." Follow the directions. You may pay the required initial fee of \$100 (\$150 in you wish to also link your website to your STARS listing) on-line with a credit card or if you prefer, download the membership form and mail a check to STARS, 1922 Fountain View, Houston, TX 77057

The bi-annual STARS Official Directory is distributed through-out Greater Houston and surrounding areas in March and September. A member is not required to participate but is encouraged to do so. For information about the Directory, please contact the Publisher, Jacke Shipwash at 1-409-771-6393.

STARS volunteer board members are: Yolanda Ramirez and Sandra Marin, Second Childhood on Fountainview, 713-789-6456.

STARS Newsletter Writer/Editor:

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Karen Frerking

Advertising is accepted.

## Letter from the editor ...

Just the other day I thought about how long I have been doing this STARS newsletter. As a member of the first advisory board when Toni Coleman began organizing STARS back around 1990-91, I proposed we have a newsletter. Everyone thought it was a great idea, but of course no one wanted to do it. I did, however and I have so enjoyed the job.

Even now after 16-17 years of writing the newsletter I get that warm feeling with every issue that THIS newsletter is the best one yet. It has been a labor of love all the way and retiring from the business doesn't have to mean I can no longer think or write about the resale industry. I am still out there learning, and shopping almost every day until my SS check runs out.

As the writer/editor I have been led to seek out the most important knowledge our membership should know to help them do business successfully. My being a member of the National Association of Resale and Thrift Shops (NARTS) has benefited STARS, and I have learned from YOU, our members as well. And I have shared some lessons I learned the hard way!

I have prepared an article about marketing on a limited budget on page 3. This is the bare bones of the essential tools you need to get the message out about your business. It saddens me to see resale shop owners cut their advertising and marketing budget when times get tough. This sends a negative message to your customers that will hurt your business even more.

**What to do?** Scale down and eliminate some of this budget expense, but not all. Consider reducing the size of the telephone book ad, for example. Decide which print media brings you the best results and cut out the others. Boost sales with creative, but inexpensive promotional ideas. Engage all of your creative skills to be a stand-out in your type of resale shop. Be open to trying new ideas to make more profit.

**My best advice?** Get out on the sales floor and sell your stuff! I'll never forget this true story shared with me some years ago by a resale shop owner: a woman came in and wandered around her store briefly, then walked out. The owner ran after her and asked her in the parking lot what she was looking for. After finding this out, the owner invited the woman back in her store and showed her several items she had been looking for, and later rang up a nearly \$300 sale!

Pat Swartley



## Marketing 101—Basic Marketing tools on a Limited Budget

by Pat Swartley

When I bought the Clothes Basket in 1987 I had no retail experience. I thought that to be a success in business all you had to do was keep a neat, well-organized store, be selective in what I accepted for consignment, be friendly to customers, and maintain a high degree of integrity in conducting business.

While all these things are necessary to be a success, it is only the first step toward success. The next step is to discover ways to bring customers into your store and keep them coming back. Listed below are some ideas to help you achieve these goals on a limited budget.

### First step is building the base

These are the essential marketing tools every shop should have:

1. **A logo and “tag” line** that describes your business on all of your business paper work and ads in the print media. In our STARS Directory one standout ad is **2<sup>nd</sup> Debut Furniture Resale**. They use a line of shadow furniture and the tag line: “Quality Home Furnishings and Accessories.” It is a simple message with an eye-catching logo. **Perfectly Good Gently Used Etc.** has a cute house and the tag line: “Everything for your house...We have it all—new and used!” Both stores have been long-time members of STARS and their logos and tag lines are well established. As a recent shopper at PGGU Etc I can attest that her tag line is right on the mark!
2. **A press kit** with basic information about your store. Be sure to mention unique merchandise or special services you offer. Identify your target customer. Add your biography. Send it with press releases about your store’s recent anniversary or other events of interest.
3. **A flyer, brochure, or newsletter** to put into the hands of everyone who walks into store. Do not let a first time customer walk out with no printed information about the store and the advantages of doing business with you.
4. **A Presence on the Web** offers many advantages and opportunities to reach existing customers as well as new ones. List your Website address on all print material. ConsignPro software even has a feature that allows consignors to check their account. Set up email accounts such as ConstantContact for contacting selected customers—get these addresses by asking for them. Post cards are expensive and time consuming to produce. Limit their use and go for email instead. I found it interesting that more people would come into my store and say, “I got your email” than would say, “I got your postcard!”

**General Tips:** Put your print advertising dollars into smaller, weekly publications in your target area. Smaller ads generally are placed in the middle of pages. Get a long-term contract for the best rates and exposure. Putting an ad in a publication dedicated to coupon sales can be very successful if you target Spring or Fall publications and stay in a 5 mile radius of your store. However, do not be tempted to spend major bucks you really can’t afford.

Team up with businesses near you for a cross-promotion of each other’s products and services. Find a way to reward your present customers for word of mouth referrals.



## Ten Reasons Your Shop is the First One I Go To When I Get My Social Security Check

1. I almost never leave without a purchase that makes me a happy shopper.
2. When I walk in the door I experience a warm feeling of “Wow, what a great looking store—well organized, easy to shop in, eye-catching displays.”
3. I am immediately made to feel welcome and someone rushes up to ask if I have seen----- (they know what I like to buy).
4. I have a coupon to spend, a card to be punched, “clothing bucks”, or have received information about a new promotion or newly arrived merchandise I can’t wait to see.
5. I can read the tags easily. Why don’t more stores use a thermal printer?
6. I have a sense the store is operated efficiently and with integrity.
7. I never leave without a verbal or printed promotional reminder of why I patronize this store above all others.
8. The adequate and well trained employees provide excellent service whether I am checking out or bringing in merchandise for consignment/buy outright.
9. The store is not too far from where I live and there are other resale/thrifts I could visit in the area after I leave YOUR store.
10. I was offered free beverage/food or an extra service not offered anywhere else.

## Five Simple Marketing Techniques To Help Your Business Grow

1. **Stick to your word.** If you disappoint customers by not promptly returning calls or addressing their needs or concerns you are likely to lose their confidence in your integrity and ability in running the business.
2. **Find your niche.** What do you do better than anyone else in businesses similar to yours? People seek out experts. What product does your customer most often come in to buy? Avoid the trap of trying to be everything to everyone.
3. **Take care of your customers.** Treat your regular customers like royalty. Create special deals for them. Announce new products or services to them first.
4. **Get the team involved.** Find employees who are eager to help make the business successful. Train them well, and instill a sense of company pride by letting them know they are important and highly regarded.
5. **Get involved in the community.** Join networking organizations or key community charitable organizations. Don’t just attend events; get on the planning committees that might help create special recognition of your business. (Host a meeting at your store?). Be a walking advertisement even if all you do is wear a nametag with your company name!

**Pat’s bonus tip:** Never let a customer walk out of your store without giving them a reason to want to come back. Tell them about an up-coming event such as a special sale or the future arrival of special new merchandise or a new service. Invite them to bring merchandise for consignment or buy-outright. Give them a reason to return with a friend. Groom them to become a VIP



## Did You Know.....



It is the official policy of Visa, Discover and MasterCard that merchants offering these credit cards may not put minimum limits on purchases. Next time you see a sign at a register saying you must make a minimum purchase of say, \$10, to use your card; protest the sign. If the retailer does not back down contact the card company. "It usually just takes a letter from us to the merchant's bank to get compliance," says MasterCard spokesperson, Tristan Jordan. Merchant non-compliance can result in fines or termination of the credit card service.

## WEBSITES OF INTEREST



Check out this new blog for discounted merchandise: [quickandsimple.com/diva](http://quickandsimple.com/diva)

Citysearch ([www.citysearch.com](http://www.citysearch.com)) has a lot of features to interest the Houston shopper. Check out the many advantages of having your store listed on their website. Find out how to get your shop listed as "Best" in Houston!

**Want to set up email accounts for your customers? Check out ConstantContact, a highly recommended company that offers easy to use tools and good support. May cost a little more than other Internet email services, but worth the price.**

## THE TAX MAN COMETH

Appraisal District tax renditions are due in April. It is important that you turn in the tax form or you may be fined for not doing so. For sure, if you do not send in the form your tax assessment will most likely increase, and if you protest and had not sent in the rendition form, you would find yourself in an awkward position.

This is the time of year that your store may be visited by a representative of your appraisal district. Every year STARS get a distress call from one of our members, usually the newer members, who tell us about a visit they received and were told they had to submit the names and addresses of all their consignors and amounts they were paid so they could be taxed on their earnings.

This is simply not true. The reason is because your consignors are **NOT IN THE BUSINESS OF SELLING MERCHANDISE**. They are bringing in personal items and are receiving far less in return than they paid. I had the pleasure of explaining this fact to an agent visiting my store some years ago and he totally denied it. He said there was a "new" law and if I didn't comply in giving him the information I would have to pay the tax for all of my consignors. I immediately said, "Yes Sir, I'll get that information to you as soon as my accountant can prepare it." I never sent it in and was never contacted about it

Check the STARS Website and Click on **RE-SALE QUEEN** for a humorous and more detailed answer.

*The Editor*

## 4<sup>th</sup> Annual ConsignPro Training Class

Brian Wilson, owner of Visual Horizons, and teacher of the class, is pleased to announce the class will be held in sunny Miami Beach, Fla. on Saturday, March 8<sup>th</sup>. This one-day class will cover every aspect of ConsignPro. Looking to buy a software program for your resale shop? Want to fully understand all the features of the ConsignPro software you already own? Take a business expense trip to beautiful Miami Beach not far from the famous South Beach area.

***LOOK INSIDE FOR THE LATEST  
S.T.A.R.S. DIRECTORY INFORMATION***



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