

BEST PRACTICES

Customer service and promotion keeps Charlottesville's Carpet Plus on top. ■ By Sonya Jennings



BUSINESS STATS

Location:
Charlottesville,
Virginia

Years in Business:
23

Number of Stores:
One

Annual Revenue:
\$1.5 Million

of Employees:
9

Promotional Mix:
TV, radio, direct mail

The showroom floor at Carpet Plus in Charlottesville, Virginia.

At Carpet Plus in Charlottesville, Virginia, owners Duane Cassis and Cindy Adams are forward thinking in their approach to marketing and promotion. Keeping the store name at the front of the minds of residents is an idea that they take very seriously. Even though the store is in a relatively small town, its marketing plan is as savvy as one you might find in a large market. The owners understand that customer service is key, but customers must be walking through the front door in order to have the opportunity to serve them.

Carpet Plus has a director of marketing, Liz Eure. That alone speaks volumes about the level of importance Cassis and Adams place on marketing. The company spent approximately 10% of its gross sales on advertising and promotion last year. This number is higher than usual, but even in a typical year, the figure is a strong 7%. These dollars are allocated in different areas including television commercials, radio spots, a twice per year direct mail campaign, and major sponsorship of the local home show. The target clients for the promotional tools are those shopping for mid to upper end products. The television commercial was created by a local ad agency and it highlights

the store's beautiful showroom. According to Eure, "The owners of Carpet Plus understand the importance of brand management, including logo and image." A major local initiative launched by the company is a program called "Re-Cork C'Ville." This program has served as a recycling project to keep wine corks out of landfills and also an effective way to keep the Carpet Plus name in the minds of potential customers all over town. The idea came about when the company was participating in the local home show. A Mini Cooper vehicle was filled with wine corks to highlight the company's environmentally friendly cork flooring products. People were

encouraged to guess how many wine corks were in the car to win a television. What started out as a fun prize contest for the home show turned into something much more interesting.

Once the contest was over, the search began for a way to recycle the corks that filled the Mini Cooper. It was then discovered that 15 billion wine corks per year were produced, and most of them ended up in landfills. This information gave Cassis the idea to recycle wine corks. Recycling boxes were made by Carpet Plus with the company name on them. The process of placing these boxes all over town began. Many wine stores, restaurants, wineries, and retail establishments in and around Charlottesville have a Carpet Plus cork recycling box at their location. For the 40 companies that have a recycling box in their store, it gives the customer another reason to come back. Attention from the local press has come from this effort, including spots on local television news as well as magazine and newspaper articles. According to Eure, "At first, I was calling around to place the boxes. Now businesses are calling me and asking for one. Every wine store in our area has a Carpet Plus cork recycling box."

Cassis and Adams also promote the store locally within the industry by hosting CFI training sessions at their store two or more times per year. Installers from all over the local area attend these meetings. According to Cassis, "the installer is the last salesperson on the job, so we invest in training and try to do what we can to attract the best installation teams." Adams adds, "Our installers know how important they are to us. We hang their certifications on the wall and also post the comment cards sent in by customers." After each completed job, a comment card is sent to the customer for feedback.

Many of the cards come back with positive comments about the installation team.

Networking opportunities and community projects are another way that the owners keep the store's name in the minds of local residents. First Night Virginia (a New Year's Eve celebration), Habitat for Humanity, Green Building Committee, Home Show Committee, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Parade of Homes, and the women's group within the Chamber of Commerce are several organizations Carpet Plus supports with time and money.

When asked how the company finds new ideas for the business, Cassis points to his constant evaluation of what is going on in the market and in the local area. He is very attentive to constantly changing local and market trends. He gets his information by reading every available industry publication, CFI news, WFCA newsletter, and he takes advantage of every training program for installers or by vendors that he can find.

Duane Cassis began Carpet Plus in 1987 after working for a local Charlottesville flooring supply company. The firm's business is 90% retail, and 10% property management, commercial and builder. Carpet Plus offers carpet, hardwood, ceramic tile, cork, bamboo, linoleum, natural fiber rugs and area rugs.

Floor Focus' goal with this monthly column is not to only give recognition and acclaim to a successful dealer but also provide our readers with ideas they can put to work in their own stores. If you know of a retailer who exhibits exemplary leadership in any facet of their business, please let us know either by email (info@floorfocus.com) or by mail.

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