

Top Solutions to Bird Shop Success

Tips to make your Bird Shop business a success.

"We have a good formula that works for us," said Carolyn Gonzalez, co-owner of Omar's Exotic Birds retail store, starting off her seminar "Blood, Sweat and Birdseed-52 Solutions to Pet Shop Success!" Gonzalez gave two talks at SuperZoo University in September in Las Vegas to retailers and industry professionals covering retail tips from promotion and customer service to security systems and private labeling. Omar's Exotic Birds has three stores in Southern California, and owners Omar and Carolyn Gonzalez do a lot of outside-the-box thinking to grow their business.

Gonzalez showed her creative streak by handing out a jumbo pack of playing cards to each seminar participant, each card giving a tip on pet shop success. Tip 1 advises retailers to devote more time to working on their business instead of in your business. Gonzalez said that retailers need to take a moment and step back and look at their business and think "What can I do to work on my business and help my business grow?"

Step 3 recommends creating an environment that reflects your passion for animals. Omar's Exotic retail stores have a clean, open feel, described Gonzalez, with happy birds and a buffet of bins filled with different foods for the customer to choose from. "Take a moment, step back and look at your store and ask, 'Is this really giving the message I want.?' she said

Seek out as much publicity as you can is Step 13. Gonzalez said that publicity is "free, fun, impressive and believable. You can get a lot of mileage out of publicity." For example, Omar's West Hollywood store received a lot of free publicity when it came in No. 1 on Los Angeles magazine's "Best of L.A." list.

Seeking out publicity tied nicely in with Step 17: Host newsworthy events. The West Hollywood store hosted the "wedding of the year," in which it "married" macaws Xena and Blue. Although the event took place in 2003, Gonzalez said she still gets calls about the event. Recently an interviewer for a London magazine wanted to talk about the bird wedding.

Gonzalez believes in in-your-face marketing. Tip 37 covers Jumping on the Birthday Party Bandwagon.

"The birthday party business is big," she said. "We take our birds everywhere. We do kids' parties and adult parties." This is the type of guerrilla marketing Gonzalez really likes.

Tip 52 ends on a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: "Do one thing every day that scares you." Gonzalez believes that getting off the "hamster wheel" is key to retailers growing their business. Trying new things—even if one fails—helps retailers grow.

Gonzalez said that they keep their customers loyal through trust.

"They trust us, and that comes with experience," she said. "Omar is very caring and patient and will talk to a customer for an hour."

Gonzalez said that is what makes the difference between pet specialty retailers and the big stores like Target and Wal-Mart, which now sell pet products.

"Even the nicest aisles can't compete with that," she said.