


# Wise retailers build their stores with bricks and clicks

By Bruce A. Love

nce upon a time, there lived a group of retailers in a happy little valley, in a land called Pennsylvania (meaning Penn's Woods). They toiled all day long, applying the skills that had been passed down from generation to generation. One day, fear swept through the land as economic strife came to their hamlet. As the winds of change blew, with a huff and a puff, major employers and whole industries began to tumble to the ground and take many jobs with them. Some inhabitants decided to flee their beautiful homeland for far off lands where the promise of a better life beckoned to them. For those who remained, including many small retailers, life would be hard for years to come.

In those days (not so long ago), retailers relied solely on local economies for life sustaining revenue. If the mines closed, or rail shops shut down, retailers would suffer, since customers would no longer have as much disposable income to spend in shops. With reduced revenues, came reduced profits. With reduced profits came less porridge. The inhabitants of the happy little valley were no longer so happy.

The story of the 3 Little Pigs comes to mind as I think of the ways in which retailers build businesses they hope will weather the economic winds of change. I am not suggesting that retailers are capitalistic pigs. Indeed, I applaud the efforts of any business that can make an honest buck. I am merely pointing out the similarities between hard working people and the brick-laying pig in the fairy tale. They know to prepare for economic hard times when the economy is strong. Meanwhile, others, who are too busy skimming off all the profits and enjoying the high life, will not be so fortunate when the tough times return!

Today, retailers are discovering that it is possible to minimize the adverse impact of fluctuating local economies. They are using e-

commerce to reach customers across the country, and throughout the world. By opening online versions of their physical stores, retailers can sell locally, as well as to customers in Pittsburgh, New York City, or even in Tokyo! Retailers that sell in traditional stores, as well as online e-stores, are referred to bricks and clicks, or clicks and mortar operations.

Recently, a bricks and clicks client was experiencing a period of slow sales in their stores. I reminded the client that they really ought to take advantage of the customer database that is automatically created when customers place orders in the online store we built for him. His database already held the names and e-mail addresses of several hundred customers. As he continued to play and sing as if he still lived in a house of straw, I quickly put together a virtual flyer and let his e-store mail it to his entire customer base without the storeowner's knowledge. When the store experienced immediate results (in the form of about \$1,600 of net profit - not bad for a business of that size), the client gained a new appreciation for his new clicks and mortar addition, and he was immediately transformed into a brick-laying pig.

Today, the big bad wolf is heading toward town once again. This time he takes the form of outrageous gas prices. The frightened residents stay inside -- afraid they'll be eaten alive by the wolf in petrochemical clothing. Instead, they are turning to the Internet to do some of their retail shopping.

The moral of this fractured fairy tale is: if you own a store and want to be as happy as a pig in mud, build your stores with clicks and mortar. You will make many new friends in distant lands, and enjoy bigger profits in the process!

## The End