

A boost for business in the face of change

A Sydney shopping centre has introduced a series of seminars to help bulletproof businesses from the challenging retail market.

By Jane Boler.

Since August, St Ives Shopping Village has been holding seminars to reinforce the basics of customer service and equip retailers with vital tools needed to ensure they continue to generate business through good and challenging financial times.

The seminars, which have now concluded, ran for between two and three hours each and included information about online opportunities.

"We have always had a program of retailer assistance and I felt it was time to provide retailers with access to industry professionals that could assist them best in re-engineering their own business and showing new ways with the growing social media opportunities," Marketing Manager of St Ives Shopping Village Sue McKindlay said.

"This is a very tough time for independent retailers, who often have only one or two stores to earn income from and need to understand and develop new ways to maximise their profits.

"We decided to embark on this series of seminars to ensure our retailers would stay on track, despite the low level of consumer confidence which has caused so

much concern in the industry."

The seminars, of which there have been four so far, were run on-site by retail expert and strategist Nancy Georges, whose aim was to help business owners find solutions to their problems and boost their profits through online strategy, implementation and website integration.

"Retailers are operating in a new world and they need to understand it and the tools available to them," Ms Georges said.

"Forty per cent of retail sales are now happening online and not in-store.

"It is important retailers are aware of how their business fits in with current consumer trends and how they can continue to establish their point of difference in the retail market."

Ms McKindlay said: "While marketing workshops have been held before, this is the first time we have really focused on the use of social media as a retailing tool.

"We hope that by attending, retailers can build stronger businesses and be able to use some new thinking and embrace the online opportunities that can partner with their bricks and mortar store."

Ms McKindlay said that in the past the focus of these seminars had always been on face-to-face selling and customer service.

"Nancy touched on this in her first workshop and, in fact, we reiterate that the future of retailing in this country is



▼ Sue McKindlay.



▼ Nancy Georges.

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the experience the customer receives in store [which] will make them come back and want to shop," she said.

While the seminars are still in their early days, attendees have provided positive feedback, indicating that there is a real desire among business owners to learn more and do more for their business.

"We have had a wonderful response and general enthusiasm from those in attendance, some of whom are now looking at one-on-one sessions with Nancy and other marketing advisory support packages we have on offer," Ms McKindlay said.

"Simply stocking the shelves and opening the door is not enough.

"The take-up by a number of the retailers to engage Nancy's services for themselves and their staff is highly encouraging and shows a really willingness to increase the profitability and ongoing development of their business."

Jennifer Berry of Adrienne & The Misses Bonney St Ives said

been in the village for more than 30 years.

"It is very easy to blame the economy for bad profits, however I believe niche retailing will survive and do even better business in this climate as we provide specialist expertise, unparalleled service and listen to our customers, allowing us to react quickly," Ms Berry said.

Another of the retailers in the village, AnnaKat owner Sue Jappy, said: "The seminars have opened up our eyes to the possibilities of retailing today and armed us to make choices."

In addition to the seminars, St Ives Shopping Village has arranged for Nancy Georges to offer one-on-one consultancy options, including four-hour power sessions, staff training, online retail start-up assistance, and other as-needed sessions.

St Ives Shopping Village is also offering promotional opportunities to its retailers, including special negotiated rates in the local press, free editorials in the centre's *Village Life* magazine, event assistance, Facebook promotions, daily

