



Post Borders Growth Strategy

As Borders Shuts Its Doors, Christian Booksellers Should Open Theirs Wider

We are saddened that Borders' liquidation will mean lost opportunities for the sale and distribution of Christian books and Bibles to a world in desperate need of them. At the same time, hundreds of store closings present opportunity for others, including independent retailers, to step in and fill the gap.

Borders' difficulties are a stark reminder of how quickly the world can change. When Borders opened its first store in 1971 in Ann Arbor, MI, the "category killer" superstore became the newest greatest thing, and it rocked the world of many independents. Since then, Borders and others like them have done many things well—yet today, Borders is irrelevant in the world of bookselling.

Many independent retailers work hard to build customer relationships and practice excellent retail just as Borders' staff did. Christian retailers have an advantage with Christian products because they are excellent evangelists for these materials. Retailers minister to customers and partner with their communities' Christian churches and ministries. However, customers are telling us today we need to do much more. If we do not adapt to the changing marketplace and new technologies, our influence will diminish or disappear altogether.

Although we hope our customers will remain loyal to us because of our history of excellent customer service and for the ministry we offer, the fact is the world is changing rapidly. We won't achieve future success by operating our businesses status quo. We must make strategic decisions and implement the right changes if we are to keep our customer base strong and remain relevant as Christian retailers and as stewards of God's truth.

To that end, we offer these tactical tips to glean from where Borders has plowed, and continue to connect readers with God's Truth.

Connect with your community

- Host community input meetings to discuss publishing trends, availability of titles, online services you offer, and other relevant issues.
- Ask for input on what your customers would like to see happen at their local Christian store, such as programs, events, special titles/collections, services, classes they would like to take, etc.
- Use commonalities you have with your customers to spark conversation and dialog about the role of your store in the community; let your customers interact and

discuss so your store is where these types of conversations can be held. Learn from the discussions.

Brainstorm with your staff

- Get your team involved in how to respond to the closings. How will you talk to customers during this period, can you discover former Borders customers and learn more about what they'd like to see in your store, or how your store might serve them better?
- Are there special promotions or events your team can execute that would create something special for former Borders customers in your store?
- Is there a dialog or discussion event you can develop based on a social issue, community issue, life issue, or other that would attract people into your store?
- How will you let local churches know that you're still in the community?
- Share with other retailers or look for ideas at CBA's Facebook page.

Promote your store

- Let readers know you're still in the community with local media ads and social media ads.
- Work with other Christian retailers to create a co-op advertising campaign explaining that your stores are still in the community and serving readers. (You can avoid anti-trust violations by promoting promotional discounts as long as you don't mention specific titles or prices.)
- Accept Borders loyalty cards for your loyalty programs or promotions, or invite readers to transfer to your loyalty program. Offer special incentives to entice the change – show your Borders card and get XX% off.
- What was your local Borders store doing to compete with your store? Can you emphasize that category or title selection in your store?
- Participate in Christian Store Week, which will include promotions and publicity to World Vision partners who may be new to your store.

Watch your inventory and customer requests

- With the Borders closures, are you seeing upticks or changes in new category or title sales?
- Train your frontliners to welcome and engage new customers, noting their interests and communicating possible additions to inventory or customer service to you and store managers.
- Are you hearing about special requests or needs?
- Are there categories you can provide that Borders once emphasized, such as Christian manga titles, historical romance, or others than you can promote to customers and the community?

Counter e-books

- Check with your marketing or franchise group about their plans for e-books and begin promoting that to your readers as an alternative.

- Check out industry e-book providers to begin the process of capturing your print-book readers for your e-book sales.
- Provide personal opportunities to allow customers to discover titles.
- Use your personal knowledge and expertise to present title collections or offerings that relate to specific kinds of customers, topics, or needs.