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Cupcake Crazy

The cupcake craze is one sweet trend that shows no signs of dissipating! Cupcakes are one of the nation's very favorite comfort foods and its no wonder why - they satisfy our sweet tooth in just four or five delicious bites. These yummy morsels are also the perfect tie in with the increased focus on birthdays and gifting, as well as the continuing trend toward children's products. In a time when shoppers may be scaling back their purchases, cupcakes offer up the ultimate in small affordable indulgences! Bring out the inner child in your customer by offering a fun cupcake montage in your gift shop.

Part of the beautiful luxurious *Masquerade* collection from **Meri Meri**. Birthday cupcakes each individually patterned and embellished with sequins, buttons and beads to make a great birthday card. A special card for a special day!



Two Lumps of Sugar

joined the cupcake trend offering a wide array of themed product to choose from. Check out the kitchen textiles; apron, oven mitt, chef hat, ceramic cookie jars, banks, kitchen timers, novelty sponges, lip gloss, and more.



Treat yourself to the sweet scents of one of **Mostly Memories** hottest new collections, *Sweet Treats*. Each 8 oz. handmade dessert candle captures the scent, feel and look of home-baked goodness like yummy vanilla cupcakes.

CQ Products *Cupcake Cakes* help you make any party or celebration cake extra-special. They're easy to make, fun to display and simple to serve - and every guest can enjoy their own cupcake without any cutting, forks or plates.



Peter Pauper Press' fun "Keep Calm and Have a Cupcake Journal" is a lighthearted take on the British "Keep Calm and Carry On" slogan that was meant to provide a sense of calm during WWII. The convenient small-format provides plenty of space for personal reflection.

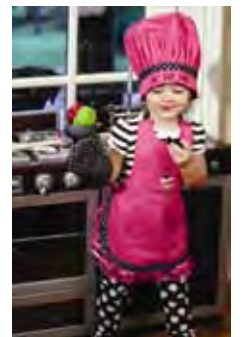
Who doesn't love a cupcake?! Girls love to make cards and these die-cut shaped cupcakes make a super special card to give, to get, and to share. This is an engaging activity that's easy to start and easy to clean up. **Peaceable Kingdom Press'** cupcake cards are yummy fun!



Penny Laine Papers is a stationery and gift design and manufacturing company. This delightful fabric covered easel back frame with grosgrain ribbon accent is perfect for baby's first birthday! Available in pink or blue and holds 4"x6" photo.



This new three piece set include the apron, chef hat, oven mitt and hours of fun. **Manual Woodworkers** stirred in a dash of color, a pinch of trim and flare and cooked up this tasteful gift idea for little helpers!



introducing new vendors



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Bangles from Heaven provide beautiful sterling silver and fine silver plate bracelets for women, babies and toddlers. Each gift packaged item is molded with words of love and support. Jewelry which comfort and inspire your customer is the niche in which Bangles from Heaven is growing.



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Zoobies
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Zoobies are award winning plush animals that turn into pillows and blankets all in one. Zoobies are incredibly easy to use and includes an instructional hangtag that illustrates how to fold up the blanket, a simple and easy-to-follow three step process. See all "Zoobie Pets" and "Baby Zoobies" on their website.
**12% Discount Baby Line

In the News!

- **Candym/Accent Group** is excited to introduce the *Anna Club Plush* collection. This line had an exciting launch during the winter gift show in Atlanta. The featured *Wheaties at Home Cat* is the best selling item from this unique assortment.
- **Bum Blockers** has just introduced a new low price for their 100% cotton printed medi-gowns. The new price is \$20 cost, less your 10% discount. The gowns and matching totes are generously cut and designed with an extra Velcro® closure to cover your bum!
- *Real Women...Real Funny™* from **Leanin' Tree** is a new collection of greeting cards and gifts featuring the art and wit of Ronnie Walter. It's a card and a gift of support with 5% of the card purchase benefiting a breast cancer charity.



Candym/Accent Group

Bum Blockers

Leanin' Tree

Vendor Specials



Peaceable Kingdom Press



I Love Bracelets

In addition to your current discount, **Peaceable Kingdom Press** is offering a Freight Special all year! For orders over \$500 (promo code PRO2), receive half freight and orders over \$1,000 (promo code PRO3), receive free freight. It is necessary to include the Promo Code on orders.

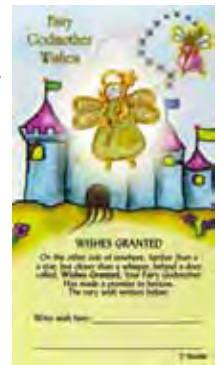
I Love Bracelets is the leader in affordable fashion jewelry. Their exclusive designs are updated every 6 months to keep up with the changing trends. The website is an excellent resource for product selection or to see the latest special at <http://ilovebracelets.com/specials.aspx>

market mix

Check out the new *Bean Bag Bellies* from **Bestever!** These soft bean bag chairs are available in cuddly animal character designs including lion, monkey, cat, dog and bear. Kids will love cuddling up to these soft, sweet new friends.



Thoughtful Little Angels is a sentiment based company dedicated to lasting memories. New for 2010 is *Fairy Godmother Wishes*, a sentimental collection that spreads wishes to all. Give them just one square foot of space and 90 days and "You Will Believe in Angels"!



During the recent Atlanta Gift Show, the beautifully painted glass birdbaths from **Evergreen** were a hot seller. The vibrant color designs include butterflies, dragonflies, frogs, shells and flowers. Table top or birdbath height stand is sold separately.



Flipsy, flopsy, fun, this stuffed camel is part of the **Wild Republic Tumblers** collection, specially designed to stand, sit, or even balance on its head. Created with nature and education in mind, this plush group includes an informational tag.



It's A Keyper Art Glass Designer Key chains from **D.M. Merchandising**. These key chains are handcrafted artistry with European flair, layered in sterling silver. Deluxe display is included with opening assortment of bright and vibrant styles.

As a leader in the industry, **Designer Greetings** has one of the most extensive greeting card lines in the United States. It is virtually unrivaled in terms of quality, value and depth, with designs totaling over 21,000 everyday and seasonal.



Wine Caddies from **Berkeley Designs** are going strong! The featured doctor wine caddy is carrying his medical kit and wearing a lab coat. This whimsical caddy holds a single standard wine bottle and will add a decorative flair to home or office.



Wellspring's #1 best-seller is now in over 20 chic, fashionable designs! *Flip Notes* are perfect for notes on-the-go as they fit snugly inside pockets, purses, or briefcases. Each Flip Note features a chic metal spring-loaded case with a blank white note pad and a coordinating retractable pen.



Tranquil Thoughts from **Red Carpet Studios** is a new inspirational line by artist Lori Siebert featuring crosses, angels, picture frames and plaques utilizing an eclectic mixed media design approach. This unique line will become a treasured gift!



Fuzzles from **Douglas** are a new species in plush animal toys. They are floppy, utterly soft and cuddly in fresh, distinctive hues and color combinations...*Fuzzles* are ready to play, gift or stand brightly in any room décor.



The Box Girls, home of conversation starters, is excited to introduce their new Mini's! These minis make a great girls night party gift or favor. Great to throw in your handbag for a night on the town; you'll want to stock up now!

Introducing...*Beautiful Times* from **Imagine Designs**. This wall art is also a functioning clock that is a beautiful and meaningful piece for any wall. The combination of funky colors and patterns with thoughtful verses about time make these wood clocks tick with life.





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Vendor Updates

Due to a lack of orders, the following Vendors will no longer be extending a discount to Retail Advantage Group Members:

- Baggallini
- Universal Designs
- WowToyz

Your Business Success Depends on Your Customer Service

by Anne M. Obarski



How differently would you run your business if you knew that the success or failure of it rested heavily on your customer service?

I was on vacation recently and observed first hand how the attitude, knowledge and response time of employees can shape a customer's opinion of a business. I traveled to the island of St. Kitts where the airport is small but efficient. It is at the taxi stand that I learned how important customer service is to this island.

Taxi drivers are plentiful and I quickly found myself with a driver named Bouncer. Bouncer informed me that the island's main source of income used to come from the production of sugar cane but it is now changing its focus to that of tourism. I asked myself, what would I do different in my business if the majority of my business was based on customer service. My answer was to use Bouncer as my prototype and here are three things he taught me.

Attitude: Bouncer had an attitude of a shrewd yet kind business man. He was upbeat and friendly and always on time. He anticipated a need before it surfaced. He was always positive, always.

Knowledgeable: Bouncer knew where he could make money. He knew the flight schedule of every plane that came into the airport. He knew his "customer" and he knew what he could offer and he "sold" it. On the way from the airport he pointed out great restaurants and points of interest along the way.

Ask For Referrals: Bouncer asked for the business and asked for referrals. Repeat and referral customers may last a few days or a few weeks. This seemed like a hard business to make a living at but Bouncer seemed to thrive on making each experience, like his passengers were the only people he had ever taken to the airport or to the beach or on a tour. He became that shrewd business man again when he handed you his card with his name on it and said, "Please share this with someone if you were pleased with my service."

As I was relaxing on my vacation I couldn't help but think about these customer service lessons and how important they are when business is tough. You may ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is my attitude and everyone who works for me positive, upbeat and contagious?
2. Do I and my employees anticipate the needs of my customers? Are we knowledgeable in every area of the business and do we over deliver on our customer's expectations.
3. Do we ask for the business? Are we shameless in telling our potential clients about our business and are we proud about what we do and who we do it for?
4. Do we ask for referrals? What an easy way to get more business than to ask someone to refer us. How often do we second guess our customers and assume that they might not give us the glowing report behind our back that they did face to face?

As Bouncer took me to the airport, he asked if he had done a good job. He did something that all good business owners should do; he invited me back to his beautiful island that he was so proud to show off.

What do you think I said?

Anne M. Obarski provides keynotes and breakout training sessions on customer service. Visit her website at www.MerchandiseConcepts.com