

It seems like all businesses, even small ones in small communities are getting more competitive. Part of the issue as always is that there are only so many consumer dollars to go around. If you want to get your share of the dollars you need to compete with those around you. I bought a small gift shop in a small resort town several years ago. At the time I bought it there were three other gift shops in the town. We all agreed that we would not carry the same merchandise. We got together and decided which supply catalogs each of us would order from. If there were similar or overlapping products we marked them the same price. We held sales on the same days and made them full town events in coordination with the restaurants and service providers in the town. This provided a great shopping experience for the customers and placed all of us on a level playing ground.

As time passed I became close friends with the other shop owners. One year we decided that it would be fun to go to one of the large trade shows together in the metro area. The show was being held at the convention center. We were very impressed with the pop up display that many of the catalog companies used. The main catalog that I order from had a very impressive pop up display with lights and a revolving statue of liberty. The display attracted many people. The company was giving away a trip to New York to go to the national trade show. We all threw in our names into the raffle bin and continued looking at the other vendors. We each found new vendors that we were considering ordering from. We also received many great complimentary items for our stores. As we were getting ready to go they announced that I had won the trip to New York. I was very excited because I had never been there and had always wanted to go. I thought my husband would be thrilled about going also, until I saw the dates. The trade show was at the same time as a hunting trip that he had planned in the western United States. One of the other shop owners said that she did not care to go because she did not like flying and the dates were the same weekend that a relative was getting married. The remaining shop owner said that she would love to go with me.

The national trade show was huge. The pop up display that was so impressive back home was nothing compared to the pop up displays that were used at this level. We found many new items to order and had a great time. We are hoping that our customers like the new merchandise we found.