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GIFTBEAT...tracking the  
product pulse of the gift industry.

## Savvy Marketing Boosts Biz During Recession

By Christine Auda

Apparently, Kim Rose never received the memo about the recession. The savvy owner of The Hope Chest humbly says, "My business has been growing double digits since opening in 2003. I feel so blessed." Rose's secret? Excellent customer service, fresh displays and a combination of key marketing strategies keep her shop booming.

With the support of her family and her spiritual faith, Rose made her childhood dream of running her own specialty boutique come true. "I wanted to offer a shop where you could find the most special items. That's where the name came in. Just as one's hope chest holds very special items, so does our shop."

The Hope Chest opened in April 2003 in quaint Dutch Neck Village in Bridgeton, N.J. The village includes a courtyard of five shops, one restaurant and a beautiful arboretum, all surrounded by peach and apple orchards. "It's like a little oasis," Rose says.

Six months after opening her boutique, Rose purchased the Holly Hut, just 500 feet away. With the help of one part-timer, and her husband, who keeps the books, she successfully ran both shops in their separate locations. "Everything just fell into place," says Rose. "But after five years, we outgrew our space and relocated to The Holly Hut building. The Hope Chest and The Holly Hut are now together under one roof." A new logo brands her combined shops as The Hope Chest.

Prior to becoming a shop owner, Rose had a crash course in retail

"I'd managed a retail shop for just six months before opening my boutique. In that job, I traveled to trade and wholesale shows. I treated that business as if it were my own, and it was the most fun I've ever had!"

Rose considers customer service integral to The Hope Chest's success. "We do get tourists, but we have a lot of regular customers. We get to know them on a first-name basis. I always want them to feel welcome, even if they are just browsing." Light pop music adds to the store's relaxing ambiance.

"It's a wonderful feeling to



◆ *The Hope Chest has a warm, welcoming atmosphere, thanks to the display acumen of owner Kim Rose.*

know that people continue to choose to shop at your store. I've had many customers that come back and say, 'I get so many compliments on this – and I told them where I got it.' I just say, 'Thank you,' because that's what keeps us here. Our best form of advertising is word of mouth."

In addition to her bread-and-butter lines — Vera Bradley, Yankee, McCall's, Chamilia — The Hope Chest carries jewelry, scarves, greeting cards, plus many unique items.

Rose does all her own mar-

keting for her business. She realizes success depends on using traditional forms as well as the latest technology to reach out to her customers and prospects.

The store offers four themed traffic-driving events per year. Some benefit the community and others, like the Hawaiian Luau, are just for fun. Sixty-five people lined up waiting for The Hope Chest to open for her Springtime in Paris event!

Email is one of the most effective forms of marketing for The Hope Chest. Direct mail has been effective in the past, but Rose is cutting back on that in favor of the more economical email marketing, which is producing results. "About 500 people have signed up for our email list since late 2009. These people want to hear from us," she says.

Rose has also found Facebook invaluable. She posts product and display photos, news about upcoming events and more. She maintains an informational website that she plans to convert to an e-commerce site. She also posts to her blog. "I love to write. The next thing I have to learn is Twitter."

Another key to Rose's success is frequently changing displays. She modifies smaller displays weekly and does a major store change, like painting walls, at least twice per year. "It's my favorite part of the business. I enjoy combining old and new elements in my displays, and my customers come to expect it — they love it!"

Rose's advice for struggling gift shops: Keep your displays and product fresh. "I'm always thinking about what's next."

### Store Stats At A Glance

- **Name:** The Hope Chest
- **City:** Bridgeton, New Jersey
- **Opened:** 2003
- **Size:** 1,200 square feet
- **Location:** Dutch Neck Village
- **Website:** [www.thehopechestonline.com](http://www.thehopechestonline.com)
- **Top Lines:** Vera Bradley, Chamilia, Yankee Candle, McCall's Candles, Lindsay Phillips

### Success Tip: Host Themed Events

Kim Rose says, "I feel blessed to do what I love." The owner of The Hope Chest also enjoys marketing her shop and planning events. Successful events she has run include:

- **Springtime in Paris:** Rose celebrated her shop's seventh anniversary with this hugely successful event. She says, "We had 65 people on line at 10 a.m. waiting for the shop to open!" The first 50 customers received a goody bag, and the shop adopted a French theme with berets, French desserts, music and artists outside painting.

- **Hawaiian Luau:** For this tropical event, Rose sports a grass skirt and leis, and she encourages

patrons to do the same by offering free gifts to customers who dress in a Hawaiian theme. "We decorate the store and our counter is transformed into a tiki hut," Rose says. "We play The Beach Boys and Hawaiian music. Plus, we offer refreshments. It's fun!"

- **Breast Cancer Awareness:** Rose offers pink refreshments and door prizes. A local hospital dispenses mammogram information, and she sells pink ribbons and donates the proceeds. "This year, I plan to include an organization that provides free mammograms for women," she says.

- **Warm Heart, Warm Hands:** This event was held in February in conjunction with Valentine's Day. Rose believes in the importance of giving to others. "We collect hats, gloves and scarves, and donate them to a local shelter. I've been blessed, and I want to help others, especially in this economy."



◆ *Kim Rose of The Hope Chest stands near some of the popular fashion accessories her shop offers.*

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