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Destination South Bend

Businesses get one-on-one time with national expert



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Jon Schallert, left, a destination business consultant, talks with Larry Piser, owner of Piser Designs, in South Bend, at his business. Schallert suggested Piser use dramatically lit product posters in his front and side windows to draw more passers-by. (South Bend Tribune Photos / August 8, 2012)

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Piser

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By GENE STOWE
South Bend Tribune Correspondent
August 13, 2012

Before he even walked into Piser Designs on Colfax Avenue, destination marketing expert Jon Schallert was telling Larry Piser how to grab more attention from passers-by, with large, dramatically lit product posters in the front and side windows.

Inside, Schallert said to ditch the poster and the best-of-show ribbon on the dominant wall, first to the right, and replace them with a blow-up of Piser's Unique Positioning Statement, a differentiating description that is a Schallert staple.

"Where does the showroom actually stop?" he asked Piser.

"The whole first floor is the showroom," Piser said, explaining that the old house shows off his skill at making furniture to fit odd spaces. "The bathroom's probably the best example. I build very site-specific stuff. I want to stop being a service and start being a product."

Schallert's visit was part of his Community Reinvention Program that South Bend joined earlier this year when seven merchants went to Destination BootCamp at The Schallert Group's suburban Denver headquarters.

In less than 24 hours, from his arrival on Tuesday evening to his departure Wednesday afternoon, the consultant visited participants on-site for intense sessions aimed at attracting more traffic.

In addition to Piser, he met with Becky Reimbold of Just Goods, Mark McDonnell of LaSalle Grill and Club LaSalle, Peg Dalton of LePeep Restaurant, Ann Rudasics of Made in Michiana, Jeanne Skelton of Inspire Me and Kathy Reddy White of CircaArts Gallery.

Schallert also gave a 90-minute morning presentation to some 100 people at the Northern [Indiana](#) Center for History.

"You just start playing a bigger game and you have a different mindset," he told the group. "You have all the potential in the world."

The expert's advice helps reach that potential, says Tamara Nicholl-Smith, director of business

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"The methods Schallert teaches put the power of action back into the hands of the [business owner](#)," she said. "These are often simple but powerful steps a business owner can do to dramatically improve their success regardless of external circumstances."

"We have such distinctive one-of-a-kind businesses here in the downtown and the region. We are leveraging what makes us special to attract more people."

At Piser Designs, that should include large, descriptive museum-style signs for each piece of furniture, Schallert told Piser, focused on distinctive features like curly cherry wood and the dark Wenge wood from Africa used sparingly for accents because, as Piser said, "Monkeys need a place to live, too."

The signage would become part of an online virtual tour of the shop.

"The goal here is to get more people coming in that can actually look at it, that would be more spontaneous walking in, not just appointments," Schallert said. "Right now it looks too much like a living room. The signs are going to be what take them through the house."

"Everybody's going to be able to understand the intricacies you're talking about. We've got to make people understand that this is really an heirloom."

He grimaced at a red sale tag on one table and suggested Piser rather mention to lookers that he needs to move that piece out of the way for a new one and might knock a little off the price.

"This is like Picasso's furniture gallery," Schallert said. "He wouldn't mark it down."

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