



Moved to greater success

What does an independent retailer do when they decide that it's time to relocate their business but possess limited resources or knowledge about the ways to do this most effectively for their store and customers? This is the way Diane Petryna, owner of Thunder Bay-based retailer Take A Hike, did it. | BY SEAN C. TARRY

Relocating is a massive undertaking, despite which way you look at it. For the average homeowner in Canada, a move requires plenty of time researching neighbourhoods and their proximity to all available amenities, exploring the value of the homes on the market, packing up clothes, furniture and all other belongings and, of course, making the move itself.

For independent retailers, the challenges are similar. They are, however, multiplied in their scale and complexity as a retailer needs to first find available space for lease at an appropriate size for their operation, ensure that the lighting and available fixtures in the space are suitable to their needs and that the space is welcoming for their customers. And, there's also the pre-move communication that they need to deliver to their clientele to ensure a seamless transition from one location to the other without losing any hours of operation in the process.

Moving – a tough decision

Relocation sounds daunting, and it certainly can be, even when the decision has been planned right down to the final detail. When the move has been brought on by circumstances beyond the retailers' control, however, the aggravation and frustration involved can be overwhelming. But with a little bit of ingenuity and help from others, the move can in fact turn out to be an advantage, resulting in even greater success for the retailer.

“After I decided to move I started to look for a new location, sort of doing an environmental assessment around me to find a highly visible place that was going to be great for my customers, where there was parking and where I was going to be comfortable growing my business. It's a real tough process to look for a space for your store - maybe a process that most retailers don't really want to ever think about. But I found that it was actually a great opportunity for me.”

— DIANE PETRYNA, TAKE A HIKE!

This was certainly the case for Diane Petryna, long-time local Owner of Take A Hike!, a leading outdoor lifestyle retailer located in Thunder Bay, Ontario, who was faced with the decision to relocate her business due to a sudden escalation of parking and safety concerns in the neighbourhood that she operated within.

“I think that all downtown areas have some problems,” admits Petryna, who has served the Thunder Bay area with outdoor living supplies and gear for more than 14 years. “But the transformation that took place in the neighbourhood right outside my store became too much for me and my business. I happened to be on a block that was for 12 years considered to be the safest spot downtown – it was the most beautiful tree-lined area with historic buildings and vibrant independent retailers on the block. But, it had changed somewhat and I was losing business. So, I decided to move.”

The emotional connections that a retailer has with their location can be very strong, making a decision to relocate a tough one. Though, it was a decision that Petryna felt she needed to make for her business, her employees and her customers.

“It was definitely the most difficult decision I've ever been forced to make in my 14 years in business,” she says. “Through life, however, I've learned that you have three options when it comes to something like this. One is to accept the way things are. The second is to work to change them. And the third, you move on. I couldn't accept the deterioration of the neighbourhood where I ran my business. So I had to make the very difficult decision to relocate.”

What to do?

The decision to move was, in fact, unbelievably difficult for Petryna who knew that she had to do everything possible to protect her investment, the jobs and livelihood of her employees and her own health and happiness.

“I certainly wasn't ready to close my store. I knew that I was running a great store with great staff and that I was blessed with fantastic customers. But I knew that I had to move, which was going to require a substantial financial reinvestment, a longer term commitment to my business and a lot of personal effort to make it happen.”



It must be said that Petryna, who had been a successful and engaged member of the community in which she operated for many years, had done as much as she could to help fix the problems that were occurring in her community ahead of making the decision to move. She had, in fact, been involved for a number of years with neighbouring businesses in a revitalization effort for their street. However, as problems escalated and revitalization efforts stalled she was left with few other options but to move her business.

"After I decided to move I first started to look for a new location, sort of doing an environmental assessment around me to find a highly visible place that was going to be great for my customers, where there was parking and where I was going to be comfortable growing my business," she says. "It's a real tough process to look for a space for your store - maybe a process that most retailers don't really want to ever think about. But I found that it was actually a great opportunity for me."

Turning a challenge into an opportunity

Petryna had discovered that while looking for a new space, that she had outgrown her old one, and also realized that she wanted to somehow take her already successful retail store and turn it into something even better through innovative store layout and display. This required a renewed confidence,

which she found within herself and with encouragement from fellow retailers, and so she set out looking for a space that was somewhere in the region of 3,000-4,000 square feet. This simple first step, however, can prove to be just as difficult as arriving at the decision to move in the first place.

"You think you've got a space and you try to imagine how you would rework that space and you get involved talking to the property owner about what they would do with respect to rent and the rest of it," she says. "You've got to invest a lot of energy to arrive at what you think might work. But for whatever reason it wasn't coming together for me at first - it didn't seem right, and I was coming to the point in my timeline that if I couldn't find a space soon, then I was going to be in trouble."

Petryna was looking for a space that was in a good solid building which lent itself to her type of store, with good visibility and traffic, convenient and ample parking for visitors, and one which was located in a safe and comfortable setting, at an affordable price, for a little less than a year. And, as the Holiday season approached, she was becoming frustrated, nearly to the point of giving up her search.

"Oh my,' I thought to myself. If I don't find something before Christmas, I'm going to have to stop looking, and then pick up the search again, do the renovations... I realized that I could very well be at my previous location for another year. And I didn't



want to do that. I had made the decision to relocate and felt that I needed to do everything I could to make it happen. But how?"

Despite her struggles with respect to finding a new space, however, Petryna's persistence paid off and she found the space that she was looking for, and with just enough time to allow her to complete the move before Christmas.

"It actually turned out to be the best location possible. I leased a 3,000 square-foot space across the street from the city's busiest restaurant in an expanding, historic and culturally rich and significant neighbourhood - perfect for my type of boutique outdoor lifestyle store."

Finding the right help

After she had found the space, Petryna also realized just how much work needed to be done to complete her move successfully. The building that she had found was quite old and required extensive renovations with completely new wiring, lighting, flooring, heating and ventilation, a reworking of the plumbing and many other structural improvements. Ensuring that all of this was done before the Holiday period was definitely going to be difficult, especially considering the fact that she had to continue running her store. Add to this the fact that infrastructure dollars being spent in the country and Thunder Bay at that time meant a limited supply of contractors to do this work, and Petryna had a potentially big head-

ache to deal with.

"I knew that I had a tight timeline. I had to come up with a new design and renovate the space, organize the physical move, set up at the new location and keep our customers informed throughout this whole process. Needless to say - I was really stressed about the move. It's not when you can be the most creative or do research about the best in retail design, and I recognized that I needed some help."

It was at that point that some suggestions were made to Petryna concerning people that could assist her in her design and renovation, which she says was definitely helpful. But then she was reminded by one of her neighbours of Barbara Crowhurst of Retailmakeover. Petryna had seen Crowhurst speak at a Canadian Gift and Tableware show prior, and following some discussions with some of Crowhurst's former clients, Petryna knew that she was the right person to help her with her move. However, in bringing her into the project - Crowhurst does almost all of her work remotely through the Skype service - Petryna did have some reservations.

"I wasn't sure how this was going to work. How could somebody possibly help me design a store who's physically not going to be in my community to see me and to see the space. But that actually turned out to be an incredible experience that got me wonderful results, and I think I got total value for dollar in working with her."

More than just design

The pair worked feverishly together selecting lighting and fixtures, colour schemes and shelving. But, what impressed Petryna most of all, beyond Crowhurst's design capabilities, was all of the other services that Retailmakeover provides to its clients.

"What I needed was more than just design," admits Petryna. "Someone who was equally interested in seeing me and my business get through a process, not just a design, but to get it opened and set up. That's the type of service that Barbara, in her coaching and design, offers. She was also able to give me the confidence that I needed to take on the role of contractor, which proved to be a huge plus."

In order to do this, Petryna needed to learn quickly about the construction business, the workings of the municipal building department, recruit an architect, engineers and tradespeople, contact building supply companies, telecommunications companies, security and software installers and others.

"Barbara showed me that, although it's a lot of work, I didn't need someone to recruit all of this talent for me. I could do it myself. And I did."

To allow Crowhurst to better understand the project that she was undertaking, Petryna provided her with photos and measurements of her old location and information about her business - overall sales, sales by category - allowing the consultant to properly determine how much space in the store was needed for different types of product.

"We sat down together to review profitability of various categories within the store. That's how we figured out how much space to allocate to each product. We did all of this together - even took a look at my existing fixtures in the store to figure

out which ones could be refurbished and re-used.”

Crowhurst also introduced Petryna to a number of technological advancements, such as Skype, digital photography, and mobile devices to use for her business.

“All of our meetings were done through Skype,” says Petryna. “This allowed us to sit down together to review photos and data, shuttle information between each other, and review products from different suppliers online. But, what these virtual face-to-face meetings did for us more than anything else was allowed us to build a solid, trusting relationship with each other.”

Crowhurst also helped her with respect to more operational tactics as well.

“If you’re moving, and you want your customers to follow you, you need to let them know what’s going on and continuously remind them of your plans. This is the only effective way to move locations and retain your top clients.”

– BARBARA CROWHURST, *RETAILMAKEOVER*

“The store design and product placement was a singular exercise,” explains Crowhurst. “But what we wanted to do was look at increasing profitability and sales through everything we did. Reviewing her P&L from last year, setting sales targets, setting buying budgets for every vendor she visits. By doing this injected a bit of structure into her business and removed the risk and removed any potential failure down the road.”

Crowhurst even worked with Take A Hike’s staff concerning sales training. And, for the very first time, Petryna now works from a promotional calendar aimed at increasing sales by 30 per cent this year.

“And, you know what?” asks Crowhurst, “she’s actually doing it. Now Diane has everything set up according to a timeline, and so she knows exactly when something is supposed to happen, which is key. We’re also on top of inventory control in her store. We’re on top of dated product. We’re on top of in-store procedures. We’re on top of increasing sales. But all of this is a result of Diane’s hard work and determination. She is really an exceptional person and an exceptional retailer. That’s why her store has always been successful, and the reason it’s become even more successful since her move.”

Crowhurst also helped Petryna with a communications plan for her move and reopening, using social media and e-newsletters, to properly communicate these things with her customers.

“It’s a vital component to any move,” says Crowhurst. “If you’re moving, and you want your customers to follow you, you need to let them know what’s going on and continuously remind them of your plans. This is the only effective way to move locations and retain your top clients.”

Results of dedication and commitment

And what does Petryna think of the results of her move and Crowhurst’s contribution to her operation?

“I still refer to Barbara’s services today because I know that I have an amazing store. It’s laid out fabulously. It’s in a fabulous location. My customers love it and I love it. I’m on such a high. I just want to continue growing and continue doing a better job. I’m looking to continue learning, and people like Barbara have incredible knowledge and experience, and I’d be foolish not to continue working with her.”

In fact, Petryna credits Crowhurst for a lot more than just the design aspect of the job that she helped her undertake.

“She encouraged me when I needed encouragement. She listened to me when I needed someone to listen. Barbara was truly the coach throughout this process, allowing me to do the best work possible,” she exclaims. “I see value for dollar. This year I’m working on putting together a buying budget, a promotional calendar – there’s a number of things that we’ll be working on through the coming year, whether it’s marketing, staffing or anything else – the goal is to make this business more profitable. So, if I have great products in a great store with great staff – it’s time that it becomes more profitable.”

And, in terms of the location that she left behind, Petryna has never looked back, urging others who are faced with a decision to move to seize the opportunity and take advantage of it.

“There are a lot of retailers out there who may not think that they have it within themselves to change locations,” she says. “But, if you know that you should, and the move will improve your business and help you grow, then you have to do it. And don’t be afraid. There are people out there who will help you with this, and help you become even more successful.”

NEW STORE OPENING

The night before the reopening of Take A Hike! on November 12, 2010, Petryna was obviously and understandably nervous.

“How would our customers respond to our new look, feel and location?” Petryna remembers asking herself. “Our reopening, however, was simply amazing and beyond any of my wildest dreams. In fact, each day since the move my customers continue to let me know how impressed they are with everything. They give me hugs and some even shed a few tears for me and my team because of what we went through and all of the hard work that they know I put into this. Who in life gets that much love and support openly shown to them?”

Take A Hike’s successful move and beautiful new location quickly became the talk of Petryna’s new neighbourhood generating steadily increasing traffic to the store and the area with increased sales that reflect this.

“I now have a store in a great location, a beautiful and effective store design, terrific products, fabulous staff, happy customers and a trusted business coach to help me and my business thrive,” beams Petryna. “I’ve never been happier or more passionate about what I’m doing.”