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# SET YOURSELF APART

*Seminar will explore how to  
build and market a destination  
business*

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Jon Schallert  
Developing Businesses as Destinations expert



# Set yourself apart

**S**mall businesses, no longer competing simply with the store down the street or across the mall, must learn to distinguish themselves so they become destinations for customers around the world and out in cyberspace.

Jon Schallert, an expert in developing businesses as destinations, says differentiation, already critical in a global economy, is even more urgent in an economic downturn.

“Primarily, businesses are location-dependent, whether it’s a grocery store or a retail store or a restaurant or a professional office,” says Schallert, who started in the field with Hallmark Cards 25 years ago and now owns a consulting firm in Colorado.

“Traditionally, people market to their local area, within 15 minutes. The problem with that is any time an economy goes down, you need more.”

Schallert will give a workshop, “Increasing Sales & Profits as a Destination Business,” 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Aug. 24 at Das Dutchman Essenhuis in Middlebury, sponsored by the North Central Indiana Small Business Development Center.

“Basically what I teach is a proprietary business-differentiation process,” says Schallert, who runs a 2½-day Destination BootCamp at his Longmont, Colo., headquarters.

Less than a decade ago, his work often involved helping local businesses in small communities learn to compete with encroaching big-box retailers such as Walmart — but the landscape has shifted.

“Walmart is not the problem any more,” Schallert says. “If they’re still thinking that ‘my differentiation starts in my



Photo provided  
**Jon Schallert will lead a seminar on increasing sales for the Small Business Development Center in Middlebury on Aug. 24.**

## Seminar will explore how to build and market a destination business

marketplace, in my shopping center, in my small town, they’re competing against the wrong competitors and their strategy is short-sighted.

“It’s not how you’re different in your marketplace, how you get people to stay in South Bend and not go to Chicago — that’s a challenge — but how do we keep the dol-

lars from going out to an Internet business that pops up every 3 seconds, or the billions of direct-mail catalogs that were mailed last year.”

The answer, he says, is differentiation — identifying precisely those qualities that set your business apart from others in the field. The strategy attracts customers from both near and far, pulling customers from hundreds of miles away for some businesses.

“You get businesses that start pulling people in from a greater distance, and the locals start saying ‘we should stay here,’” Schallert says.

“What you end up learning is you do not have to beat your competitor in every category.

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“You have to beat them in two or three key categories. You figure out where they can’t compete and magnify those differences.”

Business owners, devastated by the downturn in the economy, discover they lack differentiation but can reinvent themselves, like a client of Schallert’s in Seattle who created a monthly maintenance service for hot tub owners when her store’s sales of new hot tubs went down.

Don’t assume that “lowest price” is the most important distinctive, he warns: “People respond to value and they respond to knowing they’re going to get better service and their time is going to be valued and a whole host of other things.”

After all, it’s not like shoppers are conducting a major research project when they head out to buy.

“What they do is say ‘That sounds cool, let’s go there,’” Schallert explains. “You’re pushing consumer hot buttons. We know certain hot buttons they respond to.”

For example, he once met an older seamstress in a small Florida town who was deeply discounting her work to attract business — working long hours and making little money.

Turns out she was once the lead seamstress for Barnum & Bailey Circus, traveling the world to repair ripped ringmaster jackets. That set the business apart, attracting more customers’ interest.

Schallert says such encounters with small busi-

“ I was meeting these brilliant entrepreneurs in these out-of-the-way places that no one else was connecting with. I would ask these owners ‘How did you do this?’ They almost never knew the process.

”

ness owners, side trips from his travels to seminars — around 80 small, often blighted towns a year — led him to develop the 14-step destination-differentiation strategy.

“I would usually hit 10 to 15 businesses in a day,” he says. “I’d inevitably meet somebody that would say ‘I’m doing these things different from everybody else and my business is doing fine.’”

“I was meeting these brilliant entrepreneurs in these out-of-the-way places that no one else was connecting with. I would ask these owners ‘How did you do this?’ They almost never knew the process.”

He kept notes on 3-by-5

cards, accumulating stories and thousands of photographs until he could trace patterns that evolved into his 14-step presentation — eight strategic changes to establish differences and six tactical steps to get the story out.

Business owners too often jump to tactics — looking for cheap advertising, free publicity, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, website search engine optimization and the like — before they have sharpened the setting-apart message about their products, service, employees, business model, history, community connections or customers.

“This is all important

information that I still teach during the workshop and the BootCamp, but all of these marketing tactics can’t be employed successfully if you haven’t convinced the consumer that your business is really different and one-of-a-kind,” Schallert says.

“As you touch on points that really do make you different, consumers go ‘Wow, that place is really cool, I’ve got to go see that.’”

Do you  
have an  
idea for an  
article in

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If so, contact Joni Gibley \_\_\_\_\_

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