



Furnishings and Accessories for the Cozy Country Home
104-A North Salem Street
Apex, NC 27502
(919) 290-2575

Country Business: 2007 Retailer of the Year Contest

How to Enter:

A What is the store's location and how does its décor, both inside and out, enhance the overall look of the business?

The community today owes its origins to the Turpentine industry and the Chatham Railroad (later Seaboard Coastline, now CSX). Known as "Log Pond" in its beginning the railroad charted a train station here in 1854 giving the station and depot the name of "Apex". As it turns out it was the highest point on the line between the coal fields in Chatham Co. and the connection in Cary with the North Carolina Company. Due to difficulties related to the Civil War and the Reconstruction, the first locomotive did not pass through until 1869. The first Post Office for Apex was established in 1871, and so the town grew up around the train station; local farms; lumber mills; several general stores; a sash, blind and door factory; a turpentine distillery; a wheel manufacturer; and Baptist, Methodist and Christian churches were the backbone of the villages incorporation as Apex in 1873.

Following the 1905 fire (destroying the depot), and what locals refer to as the "Great Fire" of 1911 (destroying most of the downtown district), town fathers decided that all future construction in the downtown district and what is now Historic Salem St. would be of fireproof brick. It is within the context of this history and the old business district as it stands today on Salem St., running parallel with the railroad tracks, that we decided would be perfect for "The Rusty Bucket". Our old Country Story décor, primitive ambience and tie to celebrating things of old are as natural as the train whistle and bells you hear each day as the trains pass through town.

Today Apex is a thriving suburb community of Raleigh and Research Triangle Park North Carolina with its population expected to be well over 35,000 by year end. The efforts of the town to keep downtown historic has made it not only the corner stone of today's community but the center piece and a proud show case of the community of what a small, southern, railroad town once was. Retail, restaurants, service and professional business now occupy the district with the old depot the residence for the Apex Chamber of Commerce.

Built in 1925 The Rusty Bucket location was a car dealership for 30 years, Popes Five and Dime for 40 years and an antique store the 8 years prior to our leasing the location. At that time the landlord changed and the building was divided into two units with The Rusty Bucket residing in 1800 sq. ft. at what is now 104-A N. Salem St. Outside the dime store black glass reminds us of its history with the interior built out as an old country general store. Two barns were torn down and saved to build out the wood floors, overhead beams and tin roof over the faux storefront that now serves as our checkout and wrap area. It is a perfect setting, and complemented with the old wood build out, "The Rusty Bucket" sits as if it had been there since the "Great Fire" of 1911.



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A How does the retailer choose merchandise and what types of merchandise does the store sell?

I have discovered that Country Store Retailers choose, and it is logical that they do, merchandise for their store that reflects their “Country Style” or “Taste” and The Rusty Bucket is no exception. Our basic “theme” is “American Country” with a primitive motif, distressed finishes and rustic charm in our inventory selections. The unique advantage of “American Country” is that it is a country decorating style that, like America, is homogenous and in and of itself a “Regional Variety” and “Regional Difference” is its core. Understanding this uniqueness and selecting this regional diverse variety of inventory to stock a store will be the key to our success. With this in mind we seek to balance our own taste in the style with that of the geographic area we are located, coupled with providing selections that meet the needs of our customers.

When we began it was important to stick with the ‘theme’ of the store – “American Country”. In looking for items for the store, we buy what we love and, therefore, love what we sell. This comes across to our customers by our sincere enthusiasm about the treasures we are able to find for them. We try to attend several markets a year and are always on the lookout for local handcrafted items that fit the look of our store. We try to focus on a wide price-range of items. You could buy a \$7500 antique-reproduction stove or a 25 cent piece of candy. Quality is the key for us. We are very particular about the items we put in the store – there are items we’ve walked away from that other stores are successfully selling because they would not fit the American Country character of our store – both in looks and quality. We try to have a nice mix between affordable imports and USA made handcrafted items. In addition to the local flavor we now offer North Carolina food products and wines to add to the charm of our small town and southern heritage.

The most often asked question we get is: “...do you guys live like this at home?” And of course the answer is: “...yes we do, checkout pictures of “Twin Gables” on our web site (www.therustybucket.biz) our 87 year old farm house 6 miles out side of town. We do indeed live they way we work and work the way we live.”



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How to Enter:

A How does the retailer practice strong business management?

"WE ARE MORE in need of a vision or destination and a compass (a set of principles or directions) and less in need of a road map. We often don't know what the terrain ahead will be like or what we will need to go through it; much will depend on our judgment at the time. But an inner compass will always give us direction"

Stephen R. Covey

I suspect that there is not a person alive that at some point have said to themselves; "... I wish I were my own boss... I wish I owned my own business and were in control of my own destiny". You know, you've likely said it yourself and for sure heard others. Well, we are no different. We are in retail at The Rusty Bucket because our corporation was laying off in the dot-com-bust of the late nineties and we wanted to be in control of our career and future. Pam's dream to convert her love of American Country into a business that she could share with others her taste in decorating was at hand. Over 40 combined years in sales and marketing in the corporate world has given us a strong foundation for managing the day to day aspects of our business.

Success, however, is contingent on many things when you are in business for yourself and there are many risk and challenges when you are an entrepreneur. The key in our mind to any entrepreneur endeavor is simple: First rule for strong Business Management is to first have a Dream, second Believe in your self and that Dream and third Courage to act. If you have these three as the base of your Business Management Acumen the rest will fall in place in it's time.

The success of these past years are the result of our strong Business Management practices. In addition to our Dream, Beliefs and Courage in ourselves, we believe that failure would be.... not to try. We use and rely on many management tools to guide, direct and operate The Rusty Bucket. Within this section we provide just a few examples; excel spread sheets for Sales and Order Reports, Inventory Reports and P&L analysis. Additionally, having as your business partner a good CPA firm, a loyal Banking relationship, a reliable lawyer and resources. That's right.... resources, resources, resources.... we rely on the internet, country publications (both business and informational), we participate daily in an on line forum of like stores that include over 20 stores across the US. We are members of the Apex Chamber of Commerce, Apex Downtown Business Association, North Carolina Small Business Association. At market time we have developed a network of contacts both vendors and retailers that we rely on as they do us to exchange ideas and discuss our business – Country Home Furnishings, Décor and Gifts.



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How to Enter:

A How does the retailer practice exemplary customer service?

Attempt to define Customer Service and you will find that the definitions are as numerous as there are opinions.

Customer Service is:

"... the ability to provide a service or product in the way that it has been promised."

"... about treating others as you would like to be treated."

"... an organization's ability to supply their customers' wants and needs."

"... a phrase that is used to describe the process of taking care of our customers in a positive manner."

"... any contact between a customer and a company, that causes a negative or positive perception by a customer."

"... a process for providing competitive advantage and adding benefits in order to maximize the total value to the customer."

"... the commitment to providing value added services to external and internal customers, including attitude."

And one could go on endlessly. Many have trouble defining Customer Service but will say they know what it is when they do not have it. Of the many and of the obvious The Rusty Bucket simply defines Customer Service as "VALUE". It begins when you enter the door and the sign above says: "Enter as Strangers – Leave as Friends" and you hear someone say: "... hello welcome to The Rusty Bucket."

The Rusty Bucket strives to make its Customer Value Proposition one that demonstrates that we never lose sight of the fact that the Customer is why we are here. We make an effort to treat everyone that walks through the door as we would a friend or family member coming into our home. Our goal is to provide a relaxing cozy place where our customers can come to shop and truly feel good about their purchases, their shopping experience and themselves. We seek value in our inventory offering, we seek value by planning our events and activities a year in advance, we have a lay-a-way plan and we offer an open return policy on all purchases except custom orders.

We treat our customers as we would like to be treated. We do not believe that "the customer is always right" but we do believe that they "have a right to be treated fairly, with respect and receive value", value from their purchases, value from their transactions and value from their experiences as a member of The Rusty Bucket family.



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How to Enter:

A How does the retailer innovatively market his or her store in regard to display, advertising/PR or special events?

We have the most fun in marketing and advertising The Rusty Bucket than any other single activity. It is a labor of love to plan, develop and implement advertising to folks letting them know about the shopping experience in our store, our special events, interactive activities and new product offerings. The American Marketing Association Board of Directors in August 2004 adopted and published a new definition of marketing; *“Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.”*

It is this definition and our simple summary of Marketing as “Identifying”, Notifying” and “Diversifying” that guides us in our approach. We first begin in December of each year preparing a calendar of activities and events for the coming year. Using the master calendar as our road map we then analyze the previous years ad campaigns, cost and assess effectiveness. Additionally, we reassess our long range Goals and prepare detailed coming year Objectives for The Rusty Bucket stating them in writing.

Within the contents of this section we have provided examples of the many ways we market, advertise, communicate and inform the public and our customers on our store, The Rusty Bucket and it’s brand. We have successfully utilized TV; Radio; on line slide shows; pictures; decorating the store & store front with seasonal themes; displaying Model-A & entering area parades; live music during events; local, holiday & special trade shows; local, regional and national Publications; email Club, As The Crow Flies (Qtrly news letter); Post Cards; Bag Stuffers & Fliers; Logo Branded Products (candles, matches, bags & wrapping paper, etc...); Parade of Homes Exhibits, in store posters; sidewalk chalk board, special event signs, Brochures; and our web site: (www.therustybucket.biz) In 2007 we sponsored 16 activities and special events at The Rusty Bucket, participated in 2 Apex Downtown Business Association and 3 Town of Apex functions. Each was integrated into our daily activities and a featured effort of our advertising, PR and marketing campaigns.

We continue to explore new, innovative, cost effective and creative ways to market The Rusty Bucket. Our advertising and PR budget is approximately 12% - 15% of our annual revenue and the process is ongoing.



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How to Enter:

A How has the business grown in recent years, and what are its future goals?

WOW! It's hard to believe it has been over 5 years since I shared my Dream with Mack. A Dream to open up a country décor retail store with an old general store motif should I get laid off during the high tech implosion and dot-com-bust that started in the late nineties extending into early 2000's. And as you might guess, from where we are today, terminations were soon at hand and here we are and what a ride it has been.... We began by doing what we knew best from over 40 years of combined experience, in sales and marketing in a high tech corporation, we drafted a Mission Statement to get us started. Goals and Objectives soon followed. Coupled with the Mission Statement it became the framework of our Business Plan and calendar of actions, activities and things-to-do list. A clear statement of who we are, a snap shot of our future end game and a plan to set the wheels in motion for the immediate time frame, coupled with our actions and activities calendar road map, and we were well on our way to establishing The Rusty Bucket and opening our doors in 2003.

Today we are assessing the impact and situation following 3 years of rapid growth, subsequent to the store front opening in 2004, now being impacted by 4 to 6 months of a slight down turn in retail sales across all US markets. We do recognize that we are in a transition period positioning to stabilize a start-up now ready to move to the next level of business operations. Our long term Business Plan has The Rusty Bucket expanding into the sister space adjoining our current location doubling our floor space. Additionally, there is a need to focus our 5/10/15 Marketing Plan to increase our customer base within the 50-mile radius of the store by +40%. Growth rates and housing startups for our area continue to remain one of the highest in the nation but we are experiencing a 20% attrition rate each year from relocations. A recovery plan to replace those customers that move away and capture the new resident moving into the area will be a strategic initiative as we go into 2008. And, above all else, continue the success of planning, scheduling & implementing **EVENTS, EVENTS, EVENTS**. They are the driver for adding new customers and increasing revenue.

Our 2007 Objectives still have 5 months to complete and we are more than on target to accomplish the plan for this year. The Rusty Bucket (TRB) has a lot of work ahead as we enter into the Fall and Holiday seasons.... retails bread and butter time of year. Looking to the future we have Goals to: increase participation in shows, fairs, festivals, etc that best fit TRB; develop a Road Show Trailer w/inventory, yearly theme & action list; publish "The Rusty Bucket – Friends Cook Book"; plan & implement the "Living Show Room" to display our furniture, decorating art & motif; and to expand growing into more space & a possible second location.

In addition to these specific long rang Goals for the business we would like to expand our involvement in the community of Apex, the village, it's schools, non-profits, Southwest Wake and Chatham Counties and it's citizenry. Planning and discussion is ongoing to sponsor "TRB Citizenship of the Year" award; "TRB Scholar of the Year" award; and provide co-op part time employment from the local and area high schools DECA and/or vocational programs.

A key to our success and future growth will be to continue to rely on Goals that give us guidance into the future and establishing Objectives that provide a road map for each day's accomplishments. Revenue growth exceeds 295% over the past 3 years, we have a 4,300+ customer mailing list and many customers that have embraced us by making the Rusty Bucket apart of their family. We just love the pies, cakes and goodies our customers drop by each week.



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A What makes this store unique?

Pictures speak untold words on any subject. They clearly show what words can only suggest. Pictures tell a story about an experience. That I believe is what makes “*The Rusty Bucket*” unique, the story around the experience. From it’s beginning as an idea at the coffee pot in corporate America, to the creak made walking across the old barn wood floors. You know you are somewhere special the minute you step in the doorway and the smells of candles, potpourri and the scent of fresh baked cookies provide an irresistible aroma. An aroma that takes you back to another time, a simpler time, visits to grandma’s, Aunt Melly’s kitchen at the family farm or the olde’ country store that now resides in a Jerry Miller pen and ink or a Bob Timberlake water color.

You see, the uniqueness of “*The Rusty Bucket*”, is determined by each individual’s experience and how a stroll through the store impacts them and their shopping. It is an individual’s memory that comes to the surface and it is that individual memory that makes each person’s response different from the next. “*The Rusty Bucket*” is merely the catalyst for the shopper’s interpretation and reoccurrence of an experience long ago forgot, and now relived through a shopping trip at “*The Rusty Bucket*”. The pictures, the stories, the articles, the testimonials, while revealing, cannot replace the actual experience. We can, at best, only suggest that from the experience a person has, they’ve changed, an epiphany has occurred, it is something we each understand but find difficult to explain. We know we have felt it but to explain the experience to those that have not is complicated.

So, we come back. We return to re-experience the enlightenment only to learn that we cannot repeat our past but are pleasantly surprised to have a new and completely different experience on our return. The warmth, the closeness, the family-like environment experience, while the same at first, is different in the end. We realize it only as we step out the door and onto the sidewalk as we depart. And that keeps us coming back again and again. That my friend, coupled with the smiles on their faces, is UNIQUE!