

FORTUNE
SMALL BUSINESS

Small Dog electronics stays client-focused

A large Apple reseller makes sure that its staff is well trained to talk about its products.

By **Ingrid Tharasook**

December 17 2007: 1:36 PM EST

 [EMAIL](#) |
  [PRINT](#) |
  [DIGG](#) |
  [RSS](#)

(FORTUNE Small Business) -- When we first met [Small Dog Electronics](#) in Waitsfield, VT. (see "[Hippie and Son](#)"), the 26-person team at the Apple Inc. ([AAPL](#), [Fortune 500](#)) reseller had just weathered an industry-wide shakeout. Knowing that satisfied employees contribute great customer service, CEO Don Mayer refused to cut wages or benefits.

Three years later, he's still running his company with the same philosophy, with the goal of doubling its size.

"The best way to get there is to create even more in-depth relationships with our customers," Mayer said in a recent interview.

To that end, he opened up new channels with two retail stores in Waitsfield and Burlington in 2004 and 2006, respectively. Before opening day, employees underwent extensive workshops on in-store customer service (which Mayer says cost less than 1 percent of his budget). The "clicks-to-bricks" approach worked: Small Dog's in-store sales now account for roughly half of the company's \$25 million in revenues.

Helping spur those sales is Small Dog's unusually hands on approach. All retail employees include their personal contact information on every receipt. "In-store sales people are available to their customers well after the time of purchase," explains Allen Evans, assistant manager of the Burlington flagship.

Plans to open two new stores by next year are in motion. Because more than half of the company's sales now come from repeat customers, Small Dog has reduced its advertising expenses. Mayer makes sure that his employees know the products they sell well by requiring that they complete a series of Apple educational modules.

"We try to do customer service online and in newsletters, but it's never as effective as shaking someone's hand," Mayer explains.

Employees that max out their scores on the training module quizzes get taken out to the fanciest restaurant in town. This year alone, Mayer has dined with nearly half of his staff.

Mayer's employees seem to be as satisfied as the customers they serve. He still gives the same perks he did since the last time we spoke to him - among them profit-sharing, health insurance for pets, and on-the-clock skiing on days when business is slow.

"I had a dying dog and the company paid over 80 percent of its medical bill," says Tony Amenta, an online and phone sales manager going into his eighth year with the company. And while the free weekly massages are now only offered on a monthly basis ("for *all* employees, not just the management," notes service operations manager Matt Klein), everyone seems to be coping fine.

More from FSB

[Magical misery tour](#)

[Illegal immigration divides town](#)

[Visa fight leads to worker shortfall](#)

Current Issue

Sponsored Links

Thunderbird Certificates

Online International Business Certificates from Thunderbird. Free Info!
www.ThunderbirdGlobal.com

Business Cash Advance

Up to \$250K. No Fees or credit checks. Must process CCs. 91% approval.
AmericanCapitalAdvance.com/Cash

[Buy a link here](#)

Top Stories

[2008 Fortune 500: Wal-Mart's No. 1](#)

[Issue #1: Hotels lure with gas rebates](#)

['We were prisoners of our mortgage'](#)

[77% profit plunge at Bank of America](#)

[Stocks down on earnings, oil](#)

Find out how you can save 3-25% on business expenses.

Photo Galleries

20 Top-performing stocks

These Fortune 500 stocks offered some of the best returns to shareholders last year. Will they keep rising? [\(more\)](#)



America's Money: In their own words

Everyday folks tell their stories about hard economic times. Check back frequently for new stories. [\(more\)](#)



Genesis of a green CEO

Irish-born Coca-Cola CEO E. Neville Isdell moved to what is now Zambia as a boy. Having lived in Africa for 26 of his 63 years, Isdell says the continent shaped who he is today as he pushes Coca-Cola to become environmentally sustainable. He returns to Africa every year to pursue his passion for wildlife photography. [\(more\)](#)

Sponsors



[Sprint's Simply EverythingSM Plan \\$99.99/mo](#)