



## Ask SCORE for Business Advice

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Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

### **Column Title: Local Shopping; On-Line Buying**

When visiting Olson Sales in Green Bay recently, I remarked to Dan Gussert, one of the owners, that he seemed to be very busy. He was quick to point out that being busy doesn't necessarily mean that business is booming. Gussert faces the same problem as many specialty retailers. Customers visit the shops for the service and product knowledge they provide, but take their business home for a price search on the worldwide web.

This practice has become commonplace, and it is an issue that could doom the local specialty shop. Owners like Gussert take pride in offering the best service and will take as much time with the customer as needed in order to find the right product. Then, just when the sale should be made, the customer says he or she wants to think about it. The “think about it” usually means taking the knowledge provided by the store and looking for a lower price on-line where no service is provided.

“We assist with product and application advice. We may guide the customer to the correct fit of a particular product. We have reference guides and personal experience to help determine the correct product that will work,” Gussert explained. Having been in the business since 1978, he can offer a wealth of experience.

Yet, Gussert estimates that as many as 30% of customers will take the information and buy on-line. They think that they're getting lower prices, but that isn't always the case.

“Prices are not always lower online, after adding shipping and processing charges, the customer may not be saving any money,” noted Gussert. “When prices are lower on-line it is usually because they have no personal contact with the customer and don't have to pay a representative to provide service. There is no service provided at all.”

Gussert noted that many of the sites also advertise lower priced products only to inform the customer that they are no longer available, but they have a lower quality product that they can substitute. “The on-line price isn't a real price,” noted Gussert.

Aside from price considerations, customers should also realize that they are basically using the storeowner when they take the recommendations and buy on-line. If the storeowner doesn't make the sale, the viability of the business can be threatened. Whether it's electronic products, running shoes, fishing equipment, or guns, specialty shops can only remain in business if their good service is awarded with the sale.

As for Olson Sales, Gussert will be downsizing. Although he currently carries a full inventory of retail sporting goods, guns, and bicycles, he will be taking a full-time job and working part-time on gun sales and gunsmithing.

"If customers continue to shop the internet and big box stores, we will lose the local small businesses, and along with it the personal service and expertise," Gussert stated.

As he moves on, Gussert likes to think about all of his positive experiences and says he will miss his business, especially the friends he's made and the feeling of independence that comes from being a small business owner.

If you'd like help with business concerns, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit [www.greenbayscore.org](http://www.greenbayscore.org) or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and Assistant District Director for SCORE, Wisconsin.