

MRA "Yule Save Here" campaign makes cents

Michigan customers, take heed: If you are in search of sales and discounts, personal service, and the ability see, touch and test merchandise

... If you are in need of post-sale service that offers quick and convenient returns and repairs, without the worry of additional hidden charges, you need not go far.

Michigan customers, take heed: Put the mail order catalogs down and head out to your local retailer

That's the message the Michigan Retailers Association is sending out to Michigan consumers in a hard-hitting, statewide campaign aimed at bringing mail order customers back through the doors and into the stores.

And in effort to spread the word in time for the holiday season, MRA has launched an impressive campaign communicating the benefits and advantages of shopping locally instead of through an out-of-state mail-order firm.

The campaign, dubbed "Yule Save Here," makes good sense for Michigan retailers and Michigan consumers. In a concerted effort to attract holiday shoppers in the midst of a lagging economy, local retailers are already offering more sales and greater

discounts.

"Retailers have the flexibility to respond quickly to consumers' needs and market conditions," says Larry

Boutique in Dearborn, is just one of the many Michigan retailers planning to utilize the money-saving campaign to its fullest extent. "If anything's going to help bring people in, you better believe I'll use it."

Michigan retailers such as Payson are also in a position to offer personal service and the ability to see, touch and test merchandise before it's purchased. Despite perceived convenience, catalogs don't and can't compete with the sensory aspect of buying and selling.

Meyer explains, "You know what you're getting from your local retailer, not taking a chance on something that might sound good in a catalog when (and if) it finally arrives."

Apparently consumers are, in fact, having problems with mail-ordered products. According to the Council of Better Business Bureaus, its 173 United States bureaus received 29,840 complaints about mail-order and other "ordered products" last year alone.

Out-of-state mail-order companies often appear to offer lower product prices. But more times than not, a catalog's pricing structure is such that additional shipping and handling charges offset perceived

savings.

Moreover, retailers are in a position to offer excellent after-sale service. Mail-order houses, on the other hand, aren't. Too often, customers are stuck with the hassle and expense of mailing items back to return or exchange.

The most powerful argument for shopping locally, as Meyer points out, is that the entire community benefits when consumers buy from local retailers. "Dollars spent in stores remain in the community through jobs, new development and payment of state and local taxes."

One powerful economic argument against mail-order houses Michigan has yet to address is the amount of lost sales tax dollars, costing Michigan an estimated \$70 million a year, according to the National Governors' Association.

In an attempt to close this tax loophole, which enables out-of-state catalog and direct marketing firms to avoid collecting taxes due on mail-order goods shipped to Michigan, MRA added its name to a North Dakota case argued before the U.S. Supreme Court.

On October 7, 1991, the Court ruled on the case and the defendant — The Quill Corporation, a Chicago-based mail-order retailer — is now required to collect sales taxes on purchases shipped to North Dakota.

By Thanksgiving, thousands of MRA members throughout the state will have received the colorful "Yule Save Here" promotional material to display on their counters, in their windows,

and in their advertising. And Meyer has been traversing the state, meeting with business editors and editorial boards at key newspapers to pump up customer awareness and visibility for the campaign. "Yule Save Here" may just be the spark needed to help fuel this year's holiday season.



Meyer, MRA's vice chairman and chief executive officer. "There are some tremendous values out there already and they're going to get even better."

Kathi Payson, owner of The Elle