

## Great Lake Pizza

“In the food service business, it’s assumed that customers have a set of God-given birthrights when they come into an establishment,” says Nick Lessins co-owner of Great Lake, a pizza place in Chicago.

He continues: “It’s like they’ve been wronged in a lot of parts of their lives, and this is their chance to even the score.” Nick’s partner, Lydia Esparza, while asserting that “the customer isn’t always right,” says that great service is really about “the quality of the food we bring to the table.”

This means that at Great Lake, Nick makes every single pizza himself. He makes the dough, the mozzarella and grinds his own sausage. He orders his supplies from local farmers. And he allows no substitutions.

“We have such an edited menu, and it’s shocking how much people still want to manipulate it,” says Lydia. As if to underscore the point, Great Lake is open just four days a week and seats just 14 people—even though the place has been mobbed ever since it was written up in *GQ*.

“We wanted to start a business so we could get some control in our lives,” says Nick, who wouldn’t think of expanding to satisfy demand or make more money. “We value time as much, if not more so, than money.”

[SOURCE: Kermit Pattison, *The New York Times*, 1/14/10]

## Hot Chocolate Sparrow

Somehow, sometime, Marjorie Sparrow’s Cape Cod coffee shop became a community center. Marjorie, herself, isn’t quite sure why. “People say it’s the coffee,” she says, “but it’s got to be more than the coffee. How different could our coffee be?”

Actually, Marjorie’s shop, the Hot Chocolate Sparrow, is big on chocolate, too. This was because of her father’s advice: “Pick something you like because you’ll do it all the time.” Marjorie likes chocolate.

In the summertime, the Sparrow is “crawling with tourists only too happy to stand in line for genuine Cape Cod fudge.” But on the off-season, when only the locals remain, “people feel isolated, they crave a place to see fellow humans, and this becomes their town center.”

Jane Lowey, a regular, calls the Sparrow “a place to be still in a turning world.” Opening each day at 6:30, it has grown to become one of her town’s biggest employers, but Marjorie says she’s turned down franchise opportunities.

She says she and her husband just wanted to “build a small, respectable business on Cape Cod, do well enough to put our kids through college and raise them ethically, and we did that.”

[SOURCE: Michael Winerip, *The New York Times*, 1/3/10]



## Wild Bill Ziegler

Wild Bill’s Nostalgia Center is celebrating its 25th anniversary, which is quite something considering it’s a store that “doesn’t sell anything anyone really needs.”

The store actually had a different name — Apple Core — when Wild Bill Ziegler founded it as a gift shop on Main Street in Middletown, Connecticut. Since then, it’s had several other names — “Buffalo Bill’s, the Beetles Store, the ’60s store.”

But what hasn’t changed is the insanely eclectic merchandising mix. Wild Bill “acquires much of his goods by getting out-of-the-blue calls about a large load of items... Once a man driving by said he had a truckload of whale bones and whaling tools he had inherited from his grandfather.”

Wild Bill bought it all, and “managed to sell bones to Wesleyan University and Trinity College in Hartford, though a whale rib still hangs suspended from the ceiling of his store.”

The whale rib is really nothing compared with what Wild Bill has got going on the store’s facade. In addition to a mural of various pop-culture icons, there’s a huge bobbing head featuring Wild Bill’s likeness above the door.

The mural got Wild Bill into trouble with the town, but he eventually prevailed, arguing that the mural was art, not advertising. “The town gave us a half million dollars of free advertising by fighting us,” he says.

[SOURCE: Hannah Vahl, *The Middletown Press*, 12/14/09]

## Boutique Men



“Men tend to see shopping as less of an indulgence than women — which meant they did not cut back as much during the downturn.” An October survey by the American Affluence Research Center says, “Twenty-three percent of male respondents said they hadn’t reduced overall spending since the recession started, compared with 14 percent of women.”

A study by NPD Group meanwhile says that, last year, about “75 percent of men shopped for themselves last year, compared with just 52 percent of men in 1995.”

Because more men are shopping for themselves, without women helping them, Hermes, Coach, Ralph Lauren and others are opening up boutiques especially for men. Hermes Man, not surprisingly, features plenty of wood paneling. For the opening, Hermes offered “an \$8,500 baseball glove in a signature Hermes red.”

But the main thing is that men have their own stores. “Men don’t like to enter a men’s and women’s store to find their products at the back of the store,” says Michele Norsa, CEO of Ferragamo, which is opening special stores for men, as well.

Retailers also see big male opportunities in “emerging markets such as Russia and China,” where newly wealthy men tend to spend on themselves before their women. Indeed, in South Korea, sales of men’s apparel was up 48 percent between 2004 and 2009, compared with seven percent for women’s,” reports Euromonitor International.

[SOURCE: Christina Passariello and Ray A. Smith, *The Wall Street Journal*, 2/11/10]

## Mark Girls

More than 125 years after David McConnell pioneered Avon, 22-year-old Kristiauna Mangum is “ringing doorbells” for cosmetics on Facebook and Twitter. Kristiauna is not an Avon Lady but a Mark Girl; it’s all in the family because Avon launched Mark about seven years ago.

Being a Mark Girl means Kristiauna is “one of more than 40,000” young women in North America, “who are changing the nature of direct sales by using the brand’s personalized e-boutiques, iPhone app and new Facebook e-shop.”

She makes about \$800 a month at this, using the proceeds to help pay off her student loans. “It’s really a grass-roots kind of thing, hitting the dorms, sororities, Facebook,” says Kristiauna.

Claudia Poccia, president of Mark, says the concept is a natural. “We’ve taken the same DNA of direct selling that has always been a part of Avon’s history and applied it to the digital world for our Mark reps to reach our customers,” Claudia explains.

Mark also features its own product line, designed with a younger shopper in mind, as well. Hook Ups, which sell for about \$10, are “two-ended cosmetic dispensers that can be customized to connect, for example, lip gloss and lip pencil, eyeliner and mascara.” Last year, Mark’s revenues were about \$70 million.

[SOURCE: Camille Sweeney, *The New York Times*, 1/14/10]

## Smart Signs

Microsoft and Intel are collaborating on technology that enables digital signs to recognize shoppers and tailor promotional messages.

The hope is that the signs will help stores “emulate features of online sellers such as Amazon.com, which can identify returning customers and recommend products based on their purchase histories.”

As Llya Buktshyeyn, a Microsoft senior director of marketing, explains: “People are getting a more personalized experience online today than they were a few years ago, but there are a lot of items you want to shop for physically.”

Joe Jensen of Intel, adds: “Every year retailers lose more ground to online [sellers] and they have to do something about that.” So, in a retail environment, once the sign sizes up the shopper, it can “present offers for products more likely to appeal to them.”

It might also send a digital coupon to the shopper’s smart phone, along with a map to the promoted item’s location in the store. The technology can additionally report which displays the shopper viewed, passing “that data anonymously to advertisers to help them plan marketing pitches.”

[SOURCE: Don Clark and Nick Wingfield, *The Wall Street Journal*, 1/12/10]