



MAGNOLIA SOLUTIONS

NANCY GEORGES 'THE RETAIL MISS FIX-IT'

Stationery is the new candle!

By Nancy Georges

If someone told me that candles would be sold for \$80.00 when I started my retail career as a Grace Bros cadet 22 years ago, I would have thought they were dreaming!

The dream is a reality, with candles in all sizes, colours, fragrances, packaging and prices, becoming a key gift item over the last 10 years. In fact, there are dedicated stores that sell candles and all that goes with them.

Whilst I am a big fan of the candle and have them all over my house with backup in the linen cupboard, I think that I am a little candled-out and I am not alone.

When looking at the 'next big thing' we need to look at why the 'current big thing' was so popular. They appeal to a wide range of tastes, have multiple applications, appeal to both men and women, are ageless, have a fashion component and are functional.

Consumer value-perception is changing. They value a well designed piece, quality material and functionality. They will pay a little more for something that is different and not widely available.

Candles are; attractive, scented, evoke emotion, gorgeously packed, part of home-décor and don't need to be hidden, suitable for a wide variety of tastes and ages and most importantly are functional as they are used and not just decoration! They are not a risky item for you to stock in your stores.

The retail landscape is also changing, we now have emerging specialists who are carving a place for themselves amongst the mass merchandisers and department stores. They offer a greater assortment of product, move with the trends faster and have a higher level of customer service.

When shopping at these stores consumers seek a 'special' total shopping experience which encompasses product, ambience, service and location. Price, while still an influencer, is not a deciding factor.

When looking at their product mix, Gift and Homeware Stores need to include products that these emerging specialists are selling. This will ensure they are capitalising on the growing awareness and consumer demand built by the specialist. To ignore this would be to drive your customers towards the specialty stores.

One example is the trend back to writing stationery.

The evolution of writing and boxed stationery, which includes fashion prints, notepads, journals, boxed cards, tags, photo albums etc, in the mainstream market is easy to follow over the past few years in Australia.

Specialty paper/stationery stores did not exist in Australia eight years ago. More and more specialists are opening their doors and creating a destination for arbiters of functional, attractive stationery and writing materials and all that goes with them.

Consumers are exposed to these stores and seeking a wider variety of these products in their normal shopping destinations.

Once upon a time, a card was \$1.00 and the thought that we would be buying \$10.00 cards was unbelievable. Now, it is a reality with a range of cards and wrap that rival London's Paperchase stores.

Emails and social websites, such as Facebook, have only enhanced the need for personal communication and contact. Increasingly, I hear that people do not have time to read personal emails and are sick of only receiving bills in the mail. With such a wide variety of papers and cards available, finding your signature piece is easier than ever before.

Once a status symbol of the upper classes, fine-writing stationery, and gorgeous notecards are now sought after by the gift buying consumer. For years we dreamed of visiting the stores of the masters; Smythson of Bond Street in London, Crane & Co from the USA, Kate's Paperie in New York and Cassegrain in Paris. In fact, it was on these trips that we stocked up as we could not buy such things in Australia.

Today's consumer is now aware of these products in Australia and has added them to their shopping list when shopping at home. They desire something that is not just attractive and usable but also a reflection of their style.

So this leads me to make this bold statement – **Stationery is the new Candle.**

About Nancy As The Retail 'Miss Fix It' and the Chief of Ideas at [Magnolia Solutions](http://www.magnoliasolutions.com.au), I have drawn on my own experience of over 20 years in retail and with my first business [Paper Magnolia](http://www.papermagnolia.com.au), to help clients create integrated marketing solutions online and offline that are based on sound retail practices.

In 2009, I gave myself the challenge of finding a super low cost solution to get Paper Magnolia started selling online. At the same time, I started to use this new 'thing' called Social Media with great results! In 2010 I co-founded [Social Media Women](http://www.socialmediawomen.wordpress.com) and continue to support new social media users. I hope my experience will help you start off on the right foot.

I work with retailers, manufacturers, brands and service-providers in various roles including external Marketing Manager. My focus is on Customer Service, marketing, new media, product, retail principles and retail as a craft. I utilise online and offline tools in a wholistic approach. I am an avid user and participator in Social Media as an extension of my marketing activity.

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