



The Key to the Next Millennium

Love for their business, people, each other, and the New Age world means one couple's business is booming.

by Amanda Baltazar

The Next Millennium, in Omaha, Neb., opened in 1997 with nothing but a few used books, candles, bath salts, and stones out of the owners' personal collection. But these days, owners Charlie and Cindy Odorizzi are enjoying a booming business and a happy life.

"We were really on our own in the beginning, and we started from scratch," Cindy says. "It was so scary; we started with no money at all and had no money saved."

How did a business that came from such humble beginnings turn into a retail establishment that pulls in \$1 million per year? Credit Charlie Odorizzi for being a forward-thinker. He volunteered at a local store, Pegasus, for two years, where he learned how to run a business and get supplies and sources. He also held palm readings at the store and compiled all of the attendees' addresses for a future mailing list.

Once the Next Millennium opened, the couple took as many small orders as they could, "because we wanted a broader range of merchandise," Cindy says. "Having frequent orders meant we always had new stuff coming in. And if we didn't, we moved things around so people would notice them."

The couple also put all their profits back into the business. "One of the mistakes that small business people can make is not reinvesting

in the store inventory. When people visit your store and find a poor selection, they often will not return," says Charlie.

In this way the business gradually grew. The first location was just 200 square feet, and the couple says they were just able to make the rent. By the time they'd been in business for a year, they were able to move to a much larger, 1,250-square-foot store "just up the street, so people could find us," Cindy explains. Before long, they purchased the store next door and grew to 2,700 square feet overnight.

And now there's no looking back. Their third and most recent location is 5,000 square feet and opened last August. Half of the space is the store; half houses the office, storage, and shipping and receiving for Internet orders.

Dedication, dedication, dedication

The key to building a business is not having a lot of free time, according to Charlie. At the beginning, he worked long hours and never closed before the time designated on his door. "If customers show up and you're not there, they'll be upset. Too many businesses are run like hobbies," he says, although his most certainly is not.

Also important, says Charlie, is hiring employees who really care about working at the store—people who come up with ideas, listen

to the customers, and give advice. “We hire nice people, and then we teach them about our products. You can teach nice people about products, but you can’t teach knowledgeable people to be nice.”

The Next Millennium now has 11 employees—one full-time and the rest with schedules from four to 35 hours a week. Some are specialists who just work one night a week “so we fit them in somewhere,” he says. “We enjoy their energy and are thrilled to have them as part of the Next Millennium family, even if only on a limited basis.”

Marketing is necessary if you want to keep your business healthy, and Charlie acknowledges he’s a constant promoter. “I talk to anyone in line at the grocery store, I hand out business cards, I even compliment someone’s ring just to get talking.”

Beyond this simple word-of-mouth tactic, the couple has done local TV and radio commercials and regularly sends out direct mailings, often to let customers know about new products. They used to send out postcards to their mailing list of around 4,800 customers. “We backed off from that because we were using around a million pieces of paper a year, and I felt bad about it. It’s adverse to what we’re preaching here, and that’s hypocritical,” explains Charlie.

They are shifting more of this to e-mail and now limit postcard mailings to just once or twice a year, when they have events or a sale. “We found we weren’t reaching some people through e-mail; they felt alienated. That little postcard gets a lot of attention, especially since we don’t send them out very often.”

Early on, the Internet had played a bit part in the Odorizzis’ success, but now Web sales constitute around 60% of their business and continue to track upwards. The website (www.magicalomaha.com) was launched in October 2004 as simply an informational site.

“It wasn’t doing anything, so we took it into our own hands,” says Cindy.

“The Internet business is a lot of fun, because the store has limitless growth possibilities,” Charlie adds.

Their Web business started taking off after about a year, although it took approximately two years to produce a sizable amount of sales. During that first year, Cindy worked at optimizing search engine results and did a lot of research on how to improve online traffic. “Once you get started, it snowballs,” she says.

Running a website in addition to a bricks-and-mortar store is simple, she explains, because you have the products in stock already, and you have sources. The physical store also helps: One online shopper checked to make sure the store really existed through a space satellite and even saw Charlie’s truck out front. “Having a storefront gives you instant validity,” Cindy says.

“Some people just can’t be bothered to come into the store,” says Charlie, adding that now, thanks to the website, the Next Millennium does business all over the world—in 36 countries from Australia to Russia, Italy to China, and “places where they don’t have metaphysical stores,” he explains.

Cindy also advises that it’s important to include an “About Us” section on a website. “People want to feel like they know you.”

Destiny in the palm of their hands

And if people knew the full story behind Cindy and Charlie, they might feel even more warmly towards them. The couple met in 1992, when Cindy asked Charlie, a palmist, for a reading. She was concerned because another palmist had told her she’d die at 30. She



Profile

- Store Name: Next Millennium
- Owners: Charlie and Cindy Odorizzi
- Location: 3141 North 93rd Street, Omaha, Neb.
- Website: www.magicalomaha.com
- Year opened: 1997
- Square footage: 5,000
- Store hours: Monday–Friday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.
- Number of employees: 11
- Annual gross sales: \$1 million
- Internet sales: 60% of total
- Inventory method: Wasp barcode system for books, tarot, and CDs; by hand for everything else
- Events/workshops: Book signings, food drives, open house, customer appreciation



was 29½ at the time. Charlie read her palm, and told her that her life would change dramatically at 30, and it did: She started dating her palmist. The couple was married less than two years later.

They both had New Age beliefs prior to meeting. Cindy's mom was a mystical person who burned candles and held séances. Charlie was a civil engineer for the Air Force for 10 years, working long nights alone. During those hours he read a lot, and by chance picked up a book on palmistry.

"It fascinated me," he said. "And there were other titles mentioned in the back of the book, so I'd order one or two at a time. I realized that there were other people in the world who believed the same things as me, and it was life changing."

Since then he's created a rich emporium in the Next Millennium, selling different products in the physical store than those online. In the store, books, rocks, and minerals are the best sellers, but on the website, customers opt for fairy and dragon collectibles, jewels, perfume, and T-shirts.

The Odorizzis procure their products in a variety of ways—about 60% is done by phone, 34% online, and 6% locally, to keep money in their area.

"Some manufacturers come to us, and we love to meet them," Charlie says. "We call in a lot of orders by phone, too, and we like to create relationships. I've gotten a lot of deals by talking to people on the phone. You get unannounced specials, and you develop that personal relationship; they're not your adversary, but your friend."

Salespeople also can be a downfall, however. "The worst errors I have made have been when I allowed salespeople to talk me into what they wanted to sell, rather than what I knew deep down I truly needed," Charlie says.

The couple also finds many products at trade

shows. They attend two or three annually, returning to the best ones year after year. They particularly recommend the Dallas Gift Show (www.dallasmarketcenter.com) in January and the International New Age Trade Show West (www.inats.com), held in Denver in June.

These shows also help keep them in touch with their customer base. The Next Millennium's average customer is female, age 35 to 55, although there's something for everybody in the store.

November and December are the store's busiest months, "but we're not nearly as dependent on the holidays as some retailers," Charlie says. "If I was doing 50% of my business at that time, I'd be scared."

Customer care

To keep the store business vibrant, the Next Millennium frequently holds special events, such as small opera concerts and book signings. It will also start holding classes again this year, after a break of a few years. Topics will include how to use rocks and minerals in your healing, developing psychic abilities, astrology, and the power of positive thinking.

It seems that two people who love their work as much as the Odorizzis do will always have a vibrant business. They love sharing the lives of their customers and sharing their own lives in return.

But what they really love, Charlie says, is that they can make a difference in customers' lives. "Some people come in [to the store] depressed and just want to talk. We don't want to sell them anything. We're metaphysical bartenders."

Other times, says Cindy, customers find a particular product that "melts their heart. They have a eureka moment—they pick it up and hug it, and

Favorite suppliers

(in alphabetical order)

Blake Brothers (<http://blakebros.com>)

Coventry Candles (www.coventrycreations.com)

Deva Designs (www.devadesigns.net)

Dryad Designs (www.dryaddesign.com)

Llewellyn (www.llewellyn.com)

New Leaf Distributing (www.newleaf-dist.com)

Silver Acorn Circle (www.silveracorncircle.com)

Windstone (www.windstoneeditions.com)



New Age Retailer

it brightens their day.”

There’s a down side to being so devoted a store owner, of course. If your business is your own, you can never truly escape it. “You always think about the store, and worry, and you can’t turn that off,” Cindy says.

“At times I wish the business hadn’t consumed me so much because there are things I missed out on,” says Charlie. “I worked 80- to 100-hour weeks, and I missed out on so much, and I can’t get it back.

“You’ve got to make a balance. Inventory can always be unpacked tomorrow. I spent hours unpacking when I should have been relaxing. My advice is: Don’t let the business consume you.”

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