



Collection and Sales of Second-hand Clothes

What it takes to run a successful retail shop?

“In December 2011, I was assigned a demanding role to turn around the fortunes of a second-hand retail shop which was facing closure in Mangoche. I hesitated at first as I could not see myself making it,” says Mercy Kalibo, now the Area Manager responsible for seven of DAPP Malawi’s retail shops.

Mercy joined DAPP Malawi as a Field Officer in the HIV and AIDS programme Total Control of the Epidemic in 2007. She worked as a community health worker supporting people to take control of HIV and AIDS for three years. She went on to join DAPP Malawi’s HQ where she built her capacity of leadership in different programme sectors.

Being innovative, resilient in times of challenges and her ability to mobilise collective team work set her apart. Thus, when a second-hand retail shop operated by DAPP Malawi in Mangoche was about to face closure in two months time, she was given a chance to change its fortunes.

“As a Shop Manager, I had to sit down with the staff and come up with ways of marketing, customer care, improving the shop image and staff motivation. The retail shop in Mangoche survived,” says Mercy.

In 2016, Mercy was selected for training in second-hand clothes operation in Oman. Upon coming back she briefly worked as a Shop Manager and again went to Kenya for a second training in shop retailing. The diverse circumstances Mercy was exposed to helped her develop leadership skills for her new role as an Area Manager.

“Working together as a team is important because when we are together as a team, we can make it, we can achieve the goals. In each team there are others who are fast in doing their work, others take time, but pulling together with each doing their part ensures we move and achieve our set targets,” says Mercy.

“Customer care is very important as the customers are our bosses. We make sure the customers are assisted when they are in the shop, to get what they want. Each of the seven shops has a running a WhatsApp group, which maintains an active communication line with the customers. New clothes received, price reductions, promotions and other updates are shared using the social media platform,” says Mercy.

Mercy knows that to manage seven shops with success, one needs to put in place a marketing strategy which delivers results. The “happy hour” is one such strategy she has adopted and it has assisted her in being ahead of her competitors.

“Happy hour is when we set aside 30 minutes to about an hour for selling clothes at a significant discount to our customers. In a week there is a specific day when such a ‘happy hour’ is carried out. The concept is popular with customers as the shop receives many customers who have been informed through WhatsApp groups and other promotion activities,” says Mercy.

Finding a shop location that has the potential to offer good business takes more than finding a vacant space and occupying it. Mercy has certain qualities, which she first considers before making a decision about where to open a new retail shop.

“I look at whether the shop is accessible from various routes. I consider whether the location has what kind of customer power. I go to the potential area and spend time observing the people passing by, and that gives me an idea of how frequently people move up and down. If I am satisfied with the shop’s accessibility and the customer power, I know that here we can make good business. I then go for it,” says Mercy.

Now the shop has satisfied Mercy over the set demands on her checklist, what comes next?

“We develop a task list and we have only two weeks to run around before we open doors for business. The task list has big and small activities, which ought to be done in preparation for starting business. We go for processing the license with the local authorities. We go for branding the shop and poster making, to ensure people know DAPP Malawi is here and going to open a shop at that particular date. It demands finding new staff, getting new clothes, coordinating with administration on the budget, securing clothes displaying stands, demarcation of the areas, production and sorting area,” explains Mercy.

Quality is one major area a customer is attracted to. Selling the second-hand clothes has no exception, as there are different customers who come to the shop each day across various societal classes. Just how does one convince customers to see quality in the clothes?

“Besides being a second-hand clothes, they are nice, fresh and unique fashionable clothes. We make sure every day there are new clothes of high quality and top grade, which we add to the stock. Our sales staff, who are strategically positioned around the shop, show customers the stylish clothes they can opt for, be it children, women and men clothes, or shoes,” says Mercy Kalibo.