



Meghan Boyer

# Embrace An Inviting Space

To many people, Borders is known as much for its store atmosphere as it is for its product selection. Understanding more about Borders' philosophy when it comes to creating the right "feel" for its stores can help you understand the importance of creating ambience in your garden center.

## Get To Know Borders

Borders Group, Inc., is a retailer of books, music, movies and other information and entertainment products. According to the company, it is the second-largest music and movie retailer in the world and has an estimated customer base of 30 million annually. The company achieved \$4 billion in sales in fiscal 2005, said Anne Roman, director of corporate affairs with Borders Group, Inc. That sum represented a 3.9 percent increase in consolidated sales over the prior year.

### The Basics

**Headquarters:** Ann Arbor, Mich.

**Total stores:** More than 475 U.S. stores and more than 1,200 stores world wide

**Employees:** More than 34,000

**Product range:** The largest stores stock up to 200,000 book, music and DVD titles

**In-store events:** More than 65,000 events in 2004



Borders sells books, movies, music and more in stores that are known for their comfortable atmospheres. (Photo: Borders Group, Inc.)

It's a fairly simple idea: Make a store so inviting, so comfortable that customers want to linger among the products. The longer they linger, the more likely it is they will pick up additional purchases — at least, that's the philosophy at Borders, the retail giant that sells books, music, movies and more in stores that encourage consumers to get cozy and stay awhile. Operating with a "mi casa es su casa" attitude has helped propel the company to billions of dollars in annual sales and earned it a reputation for having warm and inviting stores.

Borders describes its shopping experience as providing customers products in a relaxed, enjoyable setting. "Borders stores

encourage people to browse, enjoy a cup of coffee and lose themselves in their favorite book — all in a warm, comfortable and welcoming setting. At each store, customers can find cozy chairs, comfortable cafes and listening stations that encourage them to relax and stay awhile," states the company's Web site.

This philosophy is practiced throughout its stores and doesn't merely involve comfortable furniture. Borders pays attention to everything, from the product mix to the blend of decor colors to the consumables offered in its cafes. Understanding how and why the company does what it does may help you shed some light on the importance of atmosphere at your garden center. ▶



Borders describes its shopping experience as providing customers products in a relaxed, enjoyable setting. (Photo: Borders Group, Inc.)





## Borders' Timeline

- Year first Borders opened: 1971
- Year first Borders' café opened: 1990
- Year first non-U.S. store opened: 1997
- Year first offered online shopping: 2001
- Largest Borders store in the world opens in Malaysia: 2005



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### A History Of Comfort

Borders has always strived to be a retail destination known for its atmosphere as well as its product mix. Anne Roman, director of corporate affairs with Borders Group, said the philosophy behind the layout and design of Borders locations is "to be a destination for those who like to explore where their life interests take them in a welcoming and comfortable environment that encourages browsing." She says these basic principles have been in place since the company's founding in 1971.

Of course, to keep the store environment fresh, Borders is always adjusting its stores to meet customer needs. "For example, beginning in 2005, we have been adding Paperchase gift and stationery shops to our Borders stores and have been converting our cafes to Seattle's Best Coffee cafes to enhance the environment," said Roman. As consumers' comfort needs change, so do the store components: The company's Web site notes that Wi-Fi service has been added to increase the environment's convenience to customers.

### What's The Benefit?

You may be thinking lingering customers do just that: They linger (and don't necessarily purchase anything). But Borders has discovered there is a correlation between the length of a customer's stay and the amount of his or her transaction, which is a key reason for why the company maintains its atmosphere philosophy. "While we don't share that figure, there is [a correlation]. We are actually focusing now on building that correlation by focusing on some additional impulse items throughout the store and enhancing use of display end cap promotions, etc.," explained Roman.

Think of your own shopping experiences. Personally, in a store with harsh lighting, bare walls and metal shelving, I'm apt to grab what I need (if I grab anything) and go. Whereas, I have been known to while away an entire Saturday at the Borders near my home and find a

number of books I "need" to read (and buy). In fact, the average customer's stay at a Borders store is approximately one hour.

In addition to getting customers to stick around, a homey atmosphere can even help introduce those who would not otherwise shop there to a store. Borders understands that diehard readers aren't the only customers, which means the stores aren't organized by the Dewey Decimal system and include merchandise and attractions for everyone. "Our vast inventory can be both enticing to the explorer and daunting to those who aren't similarly inclined, so we must make the stores appeal to both with excellent layout, easy-to-follow signage and places that encourage interaction, such as the café," said Roman.

The benefits of the company's efforts are clear: Borders succeeds not only in sales but also in community perception. According to Roman, Borders stores are often community gathering places where shoppers meet with others and attend in-store events. Local polls of area businesses in different communities frequently note the inviting atmosphere as well. ▶

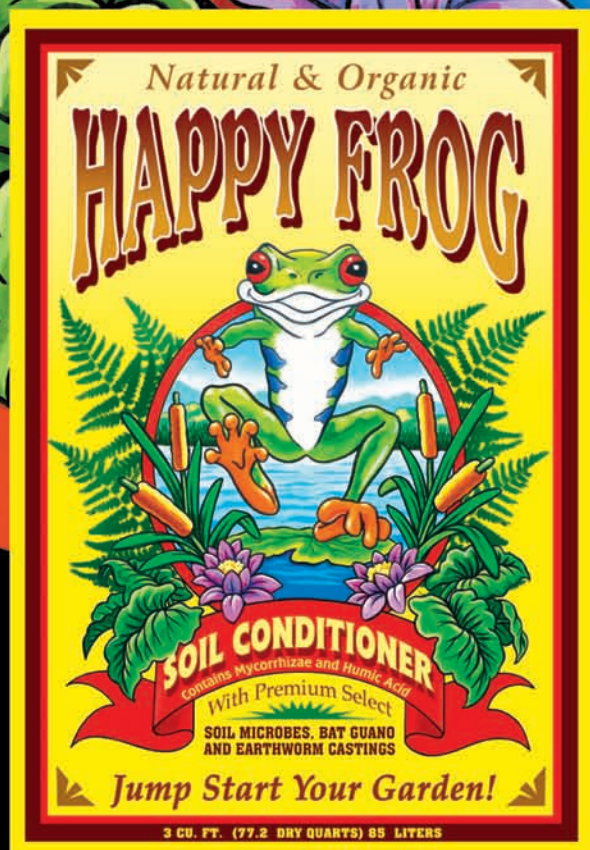
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### More Than Just Couches

Everything Borders does in its stores is geared toward allowing customers an opportunity to explore. The environment hinges on more than just comfortable chairs, roomy stacks and a café. Even aspects that one might not consider, such as the sales associates, self-help

computer kiosks and in-store events, contribute to the overall atmosphere.

Borders pays special attention to the placement of its fixtures, making sure aisles are wide enough and the features tables for books are in the appropriate places. Even the decorative touches are thought out: "In our most recent



Borders likes to include areas that encourage customer interaction in its stores, such as cafes.

store remodels, we have focused on warm reds, oranges and yellows. Our wood color is light on the fixtures. It's a blend of modern and warm and inviting," explained Roman.

Employees are encouraged to befriend customers and share their own passions for books, music and movies as well as give recommendations. They are also instructed to walk customers through the store to their selections as often as possible, said Roman. To further aid customers, there are strategically placed information desks and computer kiosks.

In this way, the inviting atmosphere greets customers no matter where they are or what they are doing in a Borders store, from interacting with employees to taking in the overall decor. It's a total commitment to maintaining a specific mood throughout.

### Encourage Shopping, Too

Creating a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere in a store can be risky; while Borders wants to attract people to its stores and invite them to linger, it is important that they also shop while they are there. "Of course, the main challenge is to make sure that you have enough going on in the store to attract purchases versus just spending time. The store and its displays must work hard to communicate to customers," said Roman.

### Take Away

If you recall last month's "Outside The Industry", the point of this column is not to encourage you to compete with large-scale retailers on their levels. It isn't feasible for you to overhaul your center's décor and order a dozen cushy chairs to spread throughout your store at this very moment. Instead, look at what Borders is doing — committing to a welcoming atmosphere in every store aspect from employee behavior to wall paint — and see what you can take away for your garden center. When you think about it that way, a discussion with your staff on how to interact with customers and a few gallons of paint are feasible changes indeed.

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