

SPRING CLEANING

by Stephanie Bond

Still suffering from the after-holiday blahs? Most likely, so are your customers. Retail business usually tapers off during the winter, so take advantage of decreased traffic to roll up your sleeves and give your store or romance section a facelift. Here are a few tips:

Set aside fifteen minutes and pretend you're a customer entering your store for the first time. Is the area outside your door clean? Do your door and windows lure passersby? Would you appreciate a mat to wipe your feet? Somewhere by the door to stash an umbrella? A shopping basket? Are the floor, the walls, and the ceiling warm and inviting? How's the temperature for someone who might be browsing in their winter coat? Are the book sections and the check-out counter clearly marked and uncluttered? Are the aisles maneuverable for strollers and wheelchairs? Are the women's and children's sections in proximity to encourage family browsing? Have you provided places to sit and stools for reaching high shelves? Is your bathroom spic and span? Does a customer standing in line have something to browse? This might be an eye-opening exercise for you and employees. Afterward, make a to-do list and organize a spring cleaning day.

Dress for cleaning day and make it fun! Wear jeans and a T-shirt and tie a bandanna around your hair. Put on oldies music to keep everyone moving. Tell customers you're giving the store a thorough once-over—they'll appreciate your efforts.

Clean. *Really* clean. That means taking ALL the books off the shelf, then dusting the shelf AND the books. Move books to the fronts of the shelves, and try to place romance novels face-out whenever possible. Always work from ceiling to floor.

Splurge and have the carpet and drapes cleaned professionally once a year.

If you have wooden shelving, paint the front of the shelves a bright color to "frame" the books displayed. You could also use a hot glue gun to add a snazzy fabric trim to the shelf. And contact paper is a quick pick-me-up for tired shelving.

Change your light bulbs from fluorescent to incandescent to prevent yellowing of paperbacks. Add a few homey details to the romance section: a lamp, a rug, a simple fabric drape. Replace promotional posters that have yellowed or curled, and throw out dilapidated dump displays.

Tag old merchandise for quick sales: Instead of slashing the price lower, offer a two-for-one deal to move more items.

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Install devices and props for sensory stimulation: time-release fragrances, music or nature sounds, plush cushions, colorful bulletin boards.

Treat the workers! Buy pizzas and cola all around to foster camaraderie among employees. If you pulled it off alone, indulge in your favorite feel-good food and relax with a good romance novel! ~**SBond**