The role of the local PC shop seems to be an endangered species, hunted by Big Box retailers, stalked by etailers, and ignored by vendors. In an industry where low price has been the mainstay diet of the predators, the PC shop will become extinct…unless it reinvents itself.

Here are some suggestions that might help.

1

You need a fresh look at your business. Step back, try to look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time. What do you see? Pretend you are a business consultant. What suggestions would you make? If this is hard for you to do, do yourself a favor and visit someone's corner PC shop and start this exercise all over again.

2

ID and personalize your customer groups. Best Buy implemented a customer analysis that divided their typical customers into recognizable groups. Best Buy even gave each profile a name to personalize the customer for the sales force. Who is your Buzz? In this exercise, you'll want to figure out the buyer characteristics of today's customer base.

3

Think like your customer. If you identified Ludwig the Heavy Gamer as one of your customer groups, then you'd better get some experience with massively multiplayer online games (MMOs).

If you've been a computer dealer for 15 years or more, chances are likely you are not part of the Facebook generation. You need to know how and why today's buyers use their PCs, their notebooks, their devices. If you don't know Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, You Tube, Revver, Digg, Skype, Meembo…then we suggest you use Google to get acquainted.

4

Once you've identified your current customer base, you'll have to decide whether to focus on consumers or small business. It's very unlikely you can do both. To help you decide which way to go, we suggest you create a "local map of opportunity." Most dealers miss

what is in front of their noses while looking for greener pastures. The local map should show circles of 5, 10 and 20 km. Inside each circle, you should identify businesses of interest by using local newspapers, Yellow Pages and local knowledge.

You can't hit a target you're not aiming at. Once you know what business is around you, you need to group them by industry and size. If you are a Very Small Business, your easiest target is other VSBs, so try to match up. Proximity will be your strongest weapon and understanding their business model a must.

If you target consumers, your local map wants to identify where, how and why groups of like consumers come together. Schools, sports clubs, hobby clubs…because consumers "flock" and follow their leaders—hopefully straight to your shop!

5

Walk around your shop and take a visual audit (but write it down!) Does your shop reflect the appetites of your target group? Do customers come in, take one look and turn to you, "Can you help me find something?" How could you divide the store to give the customer an easier way to find product and grasp the product concepts?

What's in your store window? We traveled around Hannover looking today at PC corner shops. Sorry to report we saw out-of-date displays, boxes that have been bleached by the sun (obviously at least a summer ago and not in this weather!) and a tendency to use the window as storage instead of bait. OK, we saw a few signs shouting about deals, discounts and prices but we never saw Emotionomics – projecting the sensory-emotional connection that sucks in buyers and drives successful retail.

6

Promotion costs money so more than likely you are stuck with guerilla marketing, using creativity instead of budget to promote yourself to your target audiences. You should communicate your value-added proposition in a succinct way, maybe even with humor or memorable style.

You also need to establish yourself as an expert in your promotion. Strike at the weak spot of the Big Box players: they eternally have problems to attract and educate a salesforce. You need

to show both your expertise and your longevity.

7
Shop carefully for your product mix and widen the disties you use. Big box will carry the A brands. You can, too, but you won't make money. You should provide challenger brands and alternative brands…but only those you can truly stand behind.

8
It's all about service, support and know-how. You may lose some customers to price but there are more important things to customers: convenience, respect, timeliness, availability and all the other points that frustrate buyers at Big Boxes.

And when all else fails, maybe you'll want to follow the example of A&D Computer, a computer store in a small town in New Hampshire in USA. Inspired by customers having problems with Windows Vista (compatibility issues with older software and trouble adjusting to the interface), this local PC corner shop hung out a sign that got more response than any other in its history.

The sign says simply: We Remove VISTA .