



Almost 50 store owners attended NVNR's first quarterly virtual owners retreats for NAIBA and SIBA bookstores. (To register for future meetings, click your association name: [NAIBA](#) or SIBA.) Moderating the session were Adam Waterreus, owner, Lost City Books, Washington, DC and Janet Geddis, owner, Avid Bookshop, Athens, GA.

Adam started the meeting off by sharing his strategic closing, which is ten days in August. The weekend before closing, they do a storewide "summer sale" of inventory, which is extra special as they usually don't offer discounts. On the Monday after the sale, the entire team does an activity together, like rafting, and then they have 7 days of paid vacation. This time off is in addition to their regular PTO time. They reopen the Friday of Labor Day weekend. Three days before that, the staff is in the store restocking and doing projects. They promote the store closing to customers in at least two ways: they inform them that closing offers their staff a much-needed vacation, which customers embrace, and they share their book reads for their summer vacations, and, if willing, where and how they'll be spending their time off. The summer sale has become a big revenue producer, and Adam reported that his overall August sales have remained the same compared to the years he did not close for a week. He also sets aside funds throughout the year to cover the extra vacation pay. He recommends creating a business and financial plan that only has the store in operation for 50 weeks a year if others want to do something like this.

Janet closes her store various times in the year for special reasons, like the year she took her entire staff to the SIBA fall show, so they would understand their role in the bookselling ecosystem. She also closed the store for a week during the pandemic to give her team a break from the stress. She will close the store when they have big projects to do that would be impossible to tackle if the store was open to customers. She closes the store on election day and for staff development events. If the weather is bad, their policy is that the management team members are the only ones who will come in, and if they can't, the store is closed. This had others saying they needed to create a policy similar to that, such as school closings mean the store is closed.

Both Adam and Janet reported that their web sales increase when their store is closed. Adam's store does not process orders during their annual summer closing and let their customers know there will be a delay until they reopen. Avid Bookshop's site remains open for business during the day(s) of closure, but in most cases Janet's staff won't process orders until regular store hours resume. This discussion brought up another issue to consider: how will you process special orders when the store is closed. One owner reported her stores close for a week as well as specific days, and they offer a discount for online orders and make sure the customers know that it will take longer to get their orders or send them to Bookshop.org for speedier delivery. Other stores use Bookshop to fulfill orders when they close.

Janet shared her philosophy that our culture is too focused on immediate gratification at the expense of the people. She hates the message that implies “what’s your worth if you aren’t working?” If you are treating your staff kindly, you should share that purpose with your customers, and they’ll appreciate it. Janet also mentioned taking a sabbatical, which caught the attention of many of the owners present.

If thinking of closing, consider historic sales data and community impact. Two stores mentioned closing on their universities’ home football games. One owner closes for two weeks ’vacation as people do in corporate jobs, and continues that practice with her store. Another said it took years to figure out that if schools are closed, her store should be closed, and if the news recommends not travel, she keeps her store closed. Others said if they had to close for an emergency, they just posted on the door, their website, and answer system and found no complaints from customers. Other owners hesitated on closing because of the perception that they are not doing well or going out of business, based on other stores closing in their area. This concern might be overcome by good communication with customers.

Janet shared one of the temporary store closure to-dos checklists on Basecamp.
“The places to update when changing hours or closing /opening to browsing”:

Facebook

Website: Contact Us page

Website: Change checkout messaging

Website: Change FAQ/Help page

Twitter

Instagram

Google listing

Security system

Answering system After Hours message

Answering system Outgoing greeting

POS: settings for special order email

Website: change pick up workflow emails

Website: change pick up order template

Change store open sign (electronic / paper)

Website: change store hours

website: change holiday hours

website: announcement banner

Notify UPS / FedEx drivers

The leaders in the session showed that it was possible to close your store for strategic purposes. It benefits the staff and owner and has many good operational uses. Just plan ahead and communicate with your team and your customers.