

LIVING THE GOOD NEWS ON THE HIGH STREET

Gary Grant

GARY GRANT, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN OF THE ENTERTAINER TOY SHOP CHAIN SHARES WITH MARIAN IZZARD SOME INSIGHTS ON BEING A CHRISTIAN IN RETAILING

ORIGINS

The Entertainer began when Gary and his wife Catherine took over the 'Pram and Toy Bar' in Amersham, Buckinghamshire in May 1981. They saw this as an opportunity to make the shop into somewhere where children and adults alike would come and visit, have fun, find something to 'entertain' their time and want to come back again and again.

The business has grown and has gone from strength to strength over the years to be a nationally recognised and well-loved toy shop by children and adults alike. It currently has 172 stores up and down the country. It also owns the Early Learning Centre. In May this year, the Entertainer celebrates its 40th anniversary on the high street.

Gary says: 'We think we are a unique retail business - like a signature that cannot be copied. Our vision is every childhood filled with wonder. Our mission is to be the best-loved toyshop: one child, one community at a time. Life is made up of experiences and memories. We love creating memories, creating happiness for a child and delivering an outstanding service.'

CHRISTIAN ETHOS

The Entertainer has a Christian ethos at the heart of how the company is run. In Gary's words: 'It has Christian fingerprints all over it.' In his role as Chair of the company, Gary shares that his Christian faith is evidenced in all that they do.

Those of us that have an Entertainer store nearby may well be aware of how it makes a special feature of their window displays for Christmas and Easter. At Christmas they display an attractive child friendly nativity scene in the windows, alongside the offer of a free copy of 'The Christmas Story' booklet as you step through the entrance and a free copy of the Christmas HOPE magazine. At Easter, the stores communicate the message of new life and hope for all, through its window displays.

All of the employees are aware that The Entertainer is a family run Christian business. They don't open on Sundays - unlike most other retailers - believing that Sunday is a special day, which affords the opportunity for families to gather together. They also have a policy of not opening any of their stores on Good Friday.

Most customers are respectful of the store's mandate to keep the doors firmly shut on these days. Remaining closed on a Sunday has not dented the profits of the business; in fact, they are just busier Monday to Saturday! The company also follows the biblical principle of tithing 10% of its profits every year.



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The Entertainer has a policy about being selective in the items that they stock in their shops. They want to be comfortable with what they stock ensuring that all that they sell fits with the Christian values of the company. Gary clearly states: 'Our motive is honouring, not stocking. For example, we don't stock any products associated with Halloween. We want to be true to the Bible. One passage that resonates with me is from 1 Samuel 2:30 "those who honour me I will honour".'



ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

Gary shared that May this year is not just a celebration marking 40 years of The Entertainer, but it is also a celebration of 30 years of his being a Christian. He speaks of it as an amazing journey, which has been fun, challenging and certainly an incentive to pray when under pressure! Gary recalls that when he became a Christian in May 1991, it was at a Men's Breakfast. It was there that he heard for the first time that following Jesus is about a relationship: not just knowing about him and being familiar with the Bible stories - but knowing him as a personal friend in a living, active, and transformational relationship. Becoming a Christian impacted how he ran the business, and sweeping changes were made from that time onwards to reflect the outworking of his faith in Jesus.

COMMUNITY LINKS

The Entertainer is not just part of a national high street chain. It is a store that wants to make a connection with the community, wherever they are

located. 'Community is very important to us and we seek to be active in that community supporting and engaging with them, and in turn we hope that they will support us' says Gary.

CHALLENGES

'Being a high street retailer is not without its challenges. The 2008 and 2009 financial crisis presented a challenging time for us as a family business'. The COVID-19 pandemic - just like for everyone else - has been the greatest challenge. We have been closed for seven and a half months of this last year and our finances have taken a hit. However during that time we have seen a big jump in our web business and online sales and have increased our fulfilment capacity to meet demand.

As we emerge out of the pandemic and reopen our stores, it's about dusting ourselves down, taking stock of where we are and taking one step at a time. We are all going to have to adapt to a new normal, whatever that looks like.

Going forward, it's so important to encourage people to support their local businesses - whatever they are - which will be essential for their recovery'.

Gary Grant is the Founder and Executive Chairman of The Entertainer, the fastest growing family-owned High Street toy retailer in the UK. Mindful of giving back to the communities in which he trades, 10% of profits each year are distributed by way of The Grant Foundation, supporting hundreds of smaller charitable initiatives. Gary is also Patron of several charities.

