

Jensen said Fog City News rises above other stores thanks to the amount of high-quality bars, the breadth of knowledge of Smith and his employees, and the customer service. “All the staff are really encouraged to recognize and know the regular customers,” she said. “It’s nice after a long day to stroll in and have people recognize you.” That friendliness makes you want to come back, she said. “It becomes a favorite place to stop by periodically.”



*Chocoholics, rejoice: Fog City News sells 200 kinds of artisan bars and dozens of bon-bons.
Photo credit: Sonja Malik*

Smith said when it comes to owning a business, as with buying a home, “location, location, location” is key. Being in the heart of the FiDi with hundreds of thousands of workers coming in daily and countless tourists traversing Market Street, the shop is well situated. But he added that “service, service, service” is the second-most important factor, and one that most entrepreneurs don’t always understand.

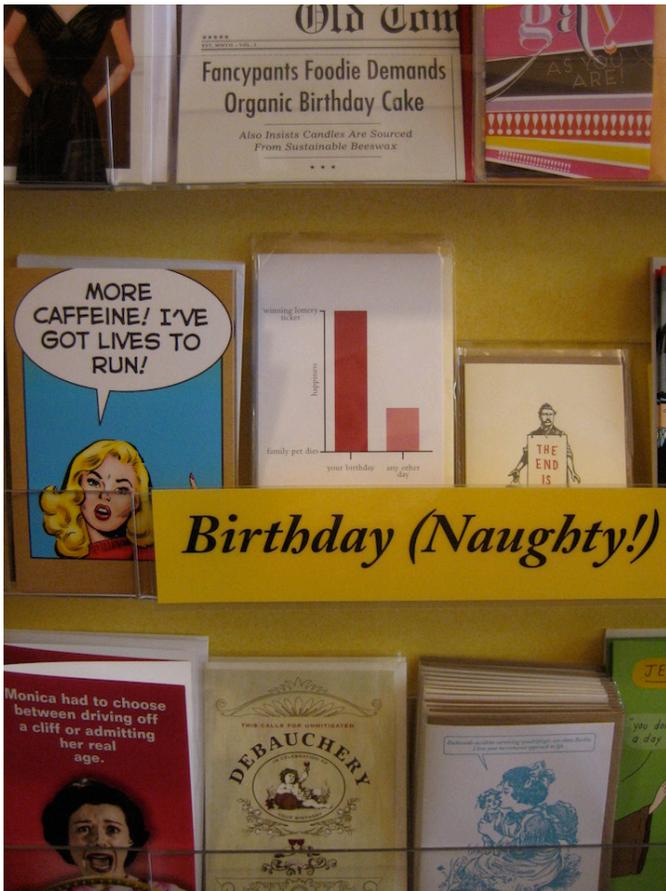


*Fog City News owner Adam Smith and his staff taste hundreds of chocolate bars each year to choose the best for their shelves.
Photo credit: Sonja Malik*

A big part of that is reacting to customers’ tastes and desires. When Fog City News opened as a traditional newsstand, Smith said, he carried a big specialty tobacco selection. Over time, that was phased out in favor of more and more greeting cards. “That really was a surprise for me,” he said, when customers began asking for them. Even with the proliferation of

Papyrus and a giant American Greetings store literally on the next block, his clientele could not get enough of his more interesting offerings.

Smith sells 50 different lines, ranging from individually made letterpress cards to naughty cards—in fact, usually more than 100 cards on display contain at least one swear word. One of the latest lines boldly proclaim anti-Trump statements with the appropriate sentiment in small letters underneath, such as, “TRUMP IS A PIECE OF SHIT. Happy Birthday!”



*Choose from hundreds of funny, naughty and handmade cards for that perfect sentiment.
Photo credit: Sonja Malik*

When you buy chocolates or cards from Fog City News, you're not just supporting Smith and his staff, but all of the artisans whose products he carries. “Our challenge is to convince a new customer that it's worth a higher price,” he said. One of the lines Smith carries is Donnelly Chocolates out of Santa Cruz, another small operation who gets exposure and a manageable wholesale account. “I don't want someone like Starbucks to say, ‘I want to put you in 500 stores,’ because I couldn't do it,” Donnelly said. “It's helpful for us to have a couple small accounts that order small quantities on a regular basis.”

Donnelly said he doesn't know of anyplace in the country that carries as many fine chocolate bars as Fog City News. He made the distinction, too, that Smith doesn't just carry any old artisan chocolates, which can vary widely in quality. He chooses carefully which ones get shelf space and has evaluated more than 4,000 bars over the years.

“I didn't realize how much work he did tasting and weeding out and looking for new products,” Donnelly said. “It's a pretty narrow door to get through at Fog City News. The people who go there have an expectation.”

Fog City News 20th Anniversary Celebration

Where: 455 Market St. (between First and Fremont), San Francisco

When: Nov. 8 and 9, 2019

What: In-store appearance by Michael Mischer of Michael Mischer Chocolates, 12:30 to 2 p.m. Nov. 8; free tastes for the first 50 attendees; prize drawings, including a 40-truffle gift assortment donated by Richard Donnelly of Donnelly Chocolates; storewide discounts for members; limited edition 20th anniversary shirts available for purchase while supplies last

Hours: 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through- Friday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday