



Sometimes the Bad Times Are the Best Times for Change

by Gabe Trahan



The exterior of Farmacia Nueva in Moca, Puerto Rico before renovations.

When I first met Luis Marrero, PharmD, I was pretty sure he was a little too enthusiastic. Marrero, owner of Farmacia Nueva in Moca, Puerto Rico, told me he had big plans for his store; he wanted to give his town a store to be proud of and he was ready to spend the money. “Wait until you see what I do with the front!” he said.

I was skeptical. If ever there was a bad time to make major changes to one’s community pharmacy in Puerto Rico, it is right now. Shrinking profit margins, a stagnant economy, a government dealing with bankruptcy, the spread of the Zika virus on the island, and stiff competition from 18 other pharmacies in the town of 40,000 people are plenty of reasons to stick with the status quo and wait out the storm before moving forward with major renovations.

But Marrero changed my mind. His 35-year-old store has seen few changes over the years, but Marrero has been charging ahead with his vision ever since he bought the store from his mother in 2014. Within the last year, Marrero has added compounding, vaccinations, and long-term care services to his pharmacy’s offerings. Just recently, he spent more than \$50,000 on an exterior store face lift—and that doesn’t include the cost of the lighted digital sign he also installed. Marrero is especially excited by how attractive the sign looks lit up at night.

Marrero also enhanced the parking area on the side of the building to make the drive-thru more visible. He tells me with a hardy laugh, “We always had a drive-thru, but no one could find it. Now, it’s always busy!” Along with an interior remodel, Marrero is planning to better use planograms, inventory management systems, and pricing strategies to control costs and boost sales.

When I asked Marrero if his business had grown a bit after all of these changes, he replied, “No, it’s growing a lot! I see new customers in my store all the time. People in Moca want to come into a nice, new-looking store.”

Marrero is passionate, energetic, intelligent, brave, and anything but overeager. Leave it to a community pharmacy to offer a ray of sunshine when it is most needed in a community. Thanks, Luis, for reminding me that sometimes the bad times are the best times for change. ■

Gabe Trahan is NCPA's senior director of store operations and marketing. Gabe uses nearly 40 years of front-end merchandising experience to help NCPA members increase store traffic and improve profits. Visit www.ncpanet.org/feo to watch videos, read tips, and view galleries of photo examples by Gabe. Follow him on Twitter @NCPAGabe for additional tips.



Farmacia Nueva's updated exterior includes more visible signage and enhanced parking.