



FIVE STEPS TO HOLIDAY SUCCESS

Here's how not to be a merchandising grinch this winter season.

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Here we are in the throes of summer heat, and we're planning our winter wonderlands for the upcoming holiday season! Some may say that we've been hitting the eggnog a little early, but we all know the importance of the Christmas season and the impact that well-planned merchandising can have on the success of the holiday as a whole.

Indeed, the face of Christmas selling continues to evolve, with the most significant changes occurring in the past 10 years. Black Friday and Cyber Monday have compelled us to be "first out" with the holiday, in spite of the perishability of the products we sell.

Our industry now competes with the efficiency of online "clicks," which offer 24/7 availability of floral products and other gifting items. In addition, free and low-cost delivery options have closed the gap of convenience for modern consumers. Now, more than ever, the importance of in-store merchandising has become the conjoining force between customer engagement and the optimization of our sales and profit goals. To help you meet your goals, here are the top five steps to holiday merchandising success.

step 1: the business plan

For every holiday, including Christmas, creating a solid business plan is paramount. The business plan contains each strategic component of the holiday and ensures that all teams are working toward a common goal. Once complete (optimally six months in advance of the holiday), the business plan should be distributed to all who are involved in its execution. Here are the components of a strong holiday business plan:

TITLE PAGE: Name of the holiday, dates referenced in the plan, index and name of the plan's authors.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Overview of the holiday season and how the proposed plan will engage customers and build revenue.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW: Year-to-date financials, store segmentation, labor needs, sales and profit goals of the holiday and anticipated risks in achieving these goals.

KEY CATEGORY STRATEGY: Advertised products, including retails, anticipated gross revenue and target gross margins.

SUPPORTING PRODUCTS: Nonadvertised and new product introductions, including retails, anticipated gross revenue and target gross margins.

MERCHANDISING PLAN: Store plan-o-grams and general store merchandising standards.

MARKETING PLAN: Required ad space and sign packets, and a social media calendar.

DISTRIBUTION PLAN: Anticipated inbound/outbound warehouse volume, with ship dates and required inspection reports.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS: Differentiation points of your company from all other competitors, including brick-and-mortar competition, e-commerce and other gifting companies. What will make your company better than any other?

OPERATIONAL STAFFING: Store schedules, holiday coverage, timelines and reporting requirements from field teams. Also include corporate contact information and after-hours emergency phone numbers in this section.

CONCLUSION: Overview of the top 10 requirements of a successful holiday.

step 2: the post-thanksgiving transition

Without doubt, the most important financial win of the holiday season is a smooth and transparent product transition out of Thanksgiving and into Christmas. Virtually overnight, store teams transition from Thanksgiving colors to Christmas colors. It's important to create a specific post-Thanksgiving transition plan that teaches store teams how to convert in-date Thanksgiving products into Christmas products.

Although the traditional colors of Christmas are pine green, snow white and apple red, there are many transitional colors that easily can be converted from Thanksgiving to Christmas, including

ivory, gold, peach, purple, burgundy and all metallics. In these cases, a quick tutorial on how to wisely convert these colors into Christmas-ready products will dramatically reduce unnecessary throw-aways the week after Thanksgiving.

step 3: the senses

Customers shop with all five senses. Many times, a merchandising plan focuses solely on the visual aspect and disregards the other four senses. The best way for us to compete with online, nonfloral gifting options is to ramp up our merchandising elements to engage all five senses.

1. SIGHT: All visual cues including color, shape, harmony, lighting, proportion, contrast, freshness and space.

2. SOUND: All audible sounds within the store, including music.

3. TOUCH: All tactile experiences within the shopping environment, including pots, baskets, fabrics, bows, upgrades, and even the plants and flowers. Keep in mind that the weight of a product equates to “monetary value” in consumers’ eyes.

4. SMELL: All fragrances within the environment, such as cinnamon, vanilla, berries and, of course, evergreen. The sense of smell is a “fast track” to the part of the brain that controls emotion and memory. Consequently, fragrance is an extremely important component of durable brand identity.

5. TASTE: The holidays are all about taste, and a supermarket environment makes it easy. There are many ways to bring taste into the floral department by offering happy-hour sweet bites or by providing a free chocolate or mini candy cane with every floral purchase.

step 4: the themes

The primary theme in this case would be Christmas, but within the department at large there should be secondary themes (called “vignettes”) that offer products for other events and occasions that occur during the Christmas time frame. Here are some examples of December display vignettes:

- Primary display: Christmas products such as poinsettias, pines, zygo cactus, etc.
- Vignette No. 1: Winter
- Vignette No. 2: Hanukkah
- Vignette No. 3: Kwanzaa
- Vignette No. 4: New Year
- Vignette No. 5: Everyday occasions such as anniversary, birthday, get well, baby, etc.
- Bouquet fixture: Include a mixture of Christmas, general winter, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, New Year and everyday occasions, based on demographics.
- Consumer bunches: Offer a strong assortment of colors, with 50 percent containing holiday-specific colors.
- Accessories: Pots, picks, wraps, balloons and signs should be used to communicate the theme on each display and to bolster sales and margin.

Be creative with each vignette, and refresh them daily with fresh products and proper maintenance. Undeniably, they represent every penny of a department’s sales and profits!

step 5: the display elements

Although the theme and contents of each display should be different, there are basic techniques of great displaymanship that are common to all. These techniques will draw customers into the floral department, and most important, keep them there long enough to buy. These display techniques are:

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN: Line, shape, form, size, space, color, value and texture.

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN: Novelty, variety, harmony, unity, balance, proportion, emphasis, contrast, rhythm and pattern.

FOCAL PRODUCT: The focal product within each vignette is displayed at the highest center point of the display and represents three different styles of the same product. For example, on the winter vignette, pine trees may be the selected focal product. This means that there should be a set of three pine trees at the highest point of the display upgraded with three different styles of décor.

The principle behind this “rule of three” is that a human’s normal eye movement wants to move from side to side, and the “rule of three” technique is used to keep a customer’s eye on the display long enough to be enticed by its beauty. If there is no center point of three items at the forefront of the display, customers’ eyes will not be affixed to the display long enough to capture interest, and they will walk quickly past it after a quick glance. Another term for this technique is “dynamic clustering,” and almost every well-merchandised store follows this rule.

VOLUME: Full displays sell product; empty displays are lonely and dull. Studies show that the fewer the products on display, the less likely a customer will make a purchase from it. Volume sells!

SENSORY COMPONENT: Signs and other graphic material within the display communicate product specifics such as the theme, product name, size/stem count and price. It’s extremely important that all signs are readable from a distance and create a barrier-free experience toward the final execution of the purchase. A general rule of thumb for indoor signage is that the text should be 1 inch tall for every 32 feet away that the sign needs to be read.

Make no mistake, the appearance and layout of each floral department is just as important as the products for sale. The sensory, theme and display elements are all essential to customers’ experience, and they can spell the difference between customers who make multiple gift purchases and those who leave empty-handed. **sf**



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