



CHRISTMAS CRACKERS!

The second in a two part series, we talk about promotions that can help you crack Christmas. Yes, it's September, but in dealer-land, Christmas time comes early! Fa la la la laaaaa!

BY KNEEZ BUKHARI

You don't have to deck the halls, hitch up your reindeer or even snow-spray lopsided snowmen onto your windows. But this is the single biggest selling period of the year and you do have to make sure you're onboard the promotional sleigh, so to speak, a-jingling your pre-seasonal bells.

Of course, Christmas is not just a dealer's busiest time; it's the same for most of the retail sector. The great thing about Christmas is that, because everyone is different, there are opportunities to market almost every kind of product. Who knows what Mr. Smith wants in his stocking? Or Mrs. Smith. Or Smith Junior for that matter.

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While online sales have increased recently, the fact is, many people still prefer to see-before-they-buy and also prefer the personal touch when it comes to sales and service. You must bear this in mind when stocking up on items. Last year we heard much about the poor Christmas sales figures and how it was the worst Christmas sales period in over a decade. It was also reported that customers were increasingly more likely to shop for gifts online resulting in a downturn in footfall for the traditional retailer at Christmas time. However, Clare Gibbard, marketing manager at Mitsubishi Pencil Company, comments, "While it is evident that people are cutting back on luxury items such as clothing and jewellery, smaller gifts, like books and stationery remain popular." Gift sets, writing and stationery sets always sell well and pens and novelty items make perfect stocking fillers and secret-santa gifts for colleagues.



Christmas also provides a good opportunity for seasonal lines and Carole Hart, senior product manager for Sellotape comments that this is, "A key period for stationery suppliers, stocks should always be planned for sales surges of certain stationery items in quarter four." In order to compete with the rest of the retail industry, who will be actively promoting staples along with their original offerings, you must push your BOGOFs and other special offers on gifts as well as accessories, and make sure they are either well-placed in-store or marketed well online.

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Customer service also makes a huge difference when it comes to the purchasing of technology and it's something that the larger competition may not have. Consumers will need information on products such as computers, laptops, digital cameras and so on and they will also need the required add-ons and peripherals – a bit like buying the batteries for the 'Squeeze-me-here' toy they've just picked out for Smith Junior. Dealers need to be fully capable of explaining the ins and outs of this equipment; if you can't use it, you won't be able to sell it. Strong product knowledge is essential so make sure that you know your technicals and if you don't, manufacturers will be more than happy to fill you in! So make use of them.

Another reason consumers will be walking into your store, is that it's easier to arrange and guarantee delivery before Christmas face-to-face and, obviously, this will be a prime objective of any gift-buyers. Get your larger or bulkier items in stock early!

You also need to think about the way you shop yourself. It's always preferable to buy everything you need in one store, rather than having to traipse around looking for the perfect accessories



for your gifts, so don't neglect the stuff with which to wrap, stick, spray, tie, pin, jazz-up and otherwise present your presents. If done well, this is a great way to boost your margin. Ellie Gabe, marketing executive - salesforce, Pentel, comments, "Price-based promotions are still important, but appealing packaging and adding value with gift boxes or wallets means more margin for retailers and, ultimately, greater gift appeal for end-users. The opportunity for link-selling can augment sales at Christmas."

Gabe adds that understanding the importance of branding helps, too. Use the power of your brands, couple it with effective use of merchandising support materials and you'll see the results in your profits.

The Christmas selling period is competitive, that's a given, so you need to anticipate what customers will want, know everything about the products you're promoting, and be confident in selling them. ■

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