



GET AHEAD OF THE GAME

Ask the right questions and watch your sales grow

BY JANE SMITH

The Corporate Gifts market is said to be huge (although nobody we spoke to could put an actual figure on it)! If you think about it though it's obvious. From traditional overprinted stationery items like leather portfolios and sticky notes to t-shirts, golf balls, baseball caps, luxury food and drink to the unusual and commemorative, most companies that you deal with will have a need at one time or another. And it actually isn't that difficult to tap into. Make your customers aware that you can help by taking the pain, risk and hassle away from them. If it's an ongoing need then you can add value by offering to stock manage and distribute these items just in the same way that you do the rest of their needs.

Sourcing can be a little trickier but as well as the companies you're already dealing with there are also specialist gift houses. It's better to find a trade only house such as Burostat or Preseli who have the expertise across a wide range of products, but you'll also find many local suppliers who are servicing the local market. Speak to your

purchasing department.

Well, it may only be October but it is now that sales and marketing departments everywhere are beginning to think about Christmas and how to both thank their loyal customers for their business but also to make sure that their name is in the forefront of those customers' minds going into 2004.

Christmas gifts represent a big chunk of the Corporate Gifts market. And it's a serious time for some manufacturers, who rely almost totally on these seasonal sales.

GLITTERY pens and metallic gold and silver pens and markers fly out of the door in the run up to Christmas!

Their whole product development programme, production and marketing and promotional campaigns have to come together at just the right time. A mistake in any one area can be a costly one – they have to be ahead of the game.

And although it might not be crucial to your business, getting ahead of the game and capitalising on the Christmas gifts market can make a real difference to your sales line. Customers will be looking for value for money but they'll also be buying the product out of a real need, so price is not as sensitive and they can be persuaded to trade up.

We spoke to Staedtler and Pilot. They both agreed that the writing instruments market, particularly in retail, is dominated by two peak selling periods; back to school (August to September) and Christmas (October to December). So from April onwards everything is geared to getting new products produced, promotions thought through and ready to go and all the point of sale (POS) materials available. POS is vital. Displays must be eye catching and attractive but at the same time space-saving. Promotional packs are also big business with lots of 3 for 2 and BOGOF deals. And don't forget the glittery pens and metallic gold and silver pens and markers – they fly out of the door in the run up to Christmas! >> p18

Dated products are also an important seasonal product range.

PDA's (electronic diaries) may be catching on but research shows that people still perceive these products to be expensive and complicated and so there is still huge demand for the traditional paper diary.

Many of you will have produced your own specialist mailers and mini-catalogues. These can be used in conjunction with telesales campaigns to reach potential customers just when they're thinking of buying. And there's great potential for personalisation. Claire Coughtrie from Letts told us "Diaries are a great marketing and internal communication tool.

BE NOSEY!!! Talk about corporate hospitality and Christmas with your customers. What are their plans, what are they going to need? How can you help?

Companies can personalise their diaries in almost any way they want to these days with corporate coloured covers, logos and information pages bound in. Adding value in this way also builds the order value and increased margin." At this time of year you can pick up more sales - this is the prime buying season and a good time for promotions. And lastly, don't forget the 'emergency' purchases just prior to Christmas.



Help your customers to help you...

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Although not strictly for the gift market but still related to the festive season we spoke to Acco, famous for their range of wall planners, have traditionally included a consumer promotion with every Sasco Planner and 2004 is no exception. Ann-Marie Hannon, Tactical Marketing Manager for Acco told us that the theme for 2004 is 'Magic Movie Nights'. She also told us, "There is a peak in purchases for year planners in advance of the new calendar year but dealers can bring forward and extend the sales period by running telephone blitz days which highlight the product and associated promotion to consumers".

Talking some more to Ann-Marie we discovered there are other some other, less obvious seasonal products that are worth thinking about. Filing products to tie in with updates of filing systems for calendar, financial and tax year ends. This also extends to shredding machines and 'File It or Shred It' promotions can be very effective (we particularly

liked that one!) thanks Ann-Marie.

Finally, and back to more obvious products there is definitely some serious levels of demand for Adhesive tapes, glue sticks and batteries coming up to Christmas.

Some useful ideas
Be noseey!!! Talk about corporate hospitality and Christmas with your customers. What are their plans, what are they going to need. Use your delivery notes to print messages and 'stuff' parcels with literature to get information and reminders out to customers.

Use an 'add a line' promotions and telephone blitzes. You should already be prompting customers to add spare batteries to orders where products need them whether they are supplied or not. But what about running a promotion in November where every customer is asked whether they'd like to take advantage of your special deal on adhesive tape?

To close we were told a funny story recently about someone who ordered 'something' from the Ann Summers website. While she was at the virtual check-out she realised that the system had automatically added 2 packs x 4 batteries to her order at an extortionate £4.99 per pack! Now that's what we call add a line....■