

Tune up your marketing for the Holidays

By Gina Kazimir / www.PRRightNow.com

There are less than two months left for holiday shopping, that critical time for retailers everywhere. You're already offering wish lists, right? But what else can you do?

To help you maximize your traffic this year, try some of these simple tips:

Free parking: Especially downtown, parking is an oft-cited concern. So why not help your customers park for free? Instead of a candy dish or floral display, keep a dish of quarters or parking tokens on the counter and offer them to customers to pay for parking. It won't cost much, but it's the kind of customer service touch that counts!

Free giftwrapping: My husband hates to wrap gifts. If he has a choice of two stores and one wraps for free, he'll choose that one. Don't lose customers like him! Spend a small bit of money on some truly elegant giftwrap – no logo bags or labels on the outside! – that busy customers are sure to appreciate.

This one doesn't have to be just for retail stores, either. Corporate offices can get into the holiday spirit and raise morale, too. Someone always loves to wrap gifts (yes, that's me) so let those employees enjoy themselves for an hour or so. Buy the paper, set up a wrapping schedule, provide a few refreshments and invite staff to bring in their gifts – it saves them time and takes some of the stress out of the holidays. And at a time when bonuses and holiday parties may not be possible, it's a cheap and easy way to show you appreciate employees!

Shipping: With the availability of flat rate Priority Mail boxes and free pick up from USPS, you can offer shipping services for just what it costs to mail a parcel. Add in your free giftwrap and you will quickly become the go to stop for easy gift giving, even for out of town customers! You can keep this one up all year, in fact, for customer service people will remember.

Online ordering: It's ideal to have your whole inventory online, but for niche retailers that may not be feasible. But you CAN offer online ordering. Simply put up a dedicated email where shoppers can contact you to request a gift for someone special – even better if you can put those wish lists online! Many people today prefer an online option to fit their schedules. You get the email, contact them for payment, wrap and ship their gift. How easy is that?! And again, you can do this year round to develop real customer loyalty.

Beyond gift cards: Sure they're easy but they're so, impersonal, right? Not yours! Package your gift cards with a lovely candle or bath item, or partner with a local florist or chocolatier to create a gift item, not just a card, that people will want to give and receive.

Most important, make the most of your marketing dollars and tell your customers what makes your store special! This may be the time to consider a **Marketing Tune-Up** from PR Right Now, a professional evaluation of what you're doing, industry trends, how you stack up and recommendations on what to add or change. The cost is minimal – just \$500 for businesses with less than \$1million in revenue – but the information you get is invaluable. Contact PR Right Now (410-420-8679 / gkazimir@prrightnow.com) today to set up your evaluation.

Happy Holidays!