

Hosting an In-Store Signing Event

It's one of the most exciting events a hobby store can offer its customers – an autograph signing event with a local sports celebrity. Fans love the opportunity to meet a sports star and receive an autograph, and autograph appearances are a great way to attract large crowds to your business.

Events like this require plenty of advance planning and organization, but the efforts will likely be well worth the time and resources you invest. Here are a few items to keep in mind when planning your big event:

- **Make the calls** – Not sure who's available for a signing? Wondering what it will cost? Pick up the phone and make some calls. Contact local teams, area show promoters, other retailers in your area, even the sports editor of your local paper. Ask what current and former athletes are in the area and how to go about contacting them for a signing session. Don't assume an event like this is beyond your budget. Some athletes might be, but others will be surprisingly affordable. You'll never know until you ask.
- **Partner with their charity** – Most athletes work with a charity that is important to them. Find out what those charities are and offer to make a donation to their charity in lieu of a direct payment to the athlete. Many times their charity is near and dear to their heart so they are willing to do more to promote the charity in the community.
- **Details, details** – Be prepared that hosting a signing event in your store requires attention to a seemingly endless array of details, many of which aren't apparent until the very last minute. You need to make sure you choose a location within your store that allows for a smooth flow of traffic through the store. You also need to have enough merchandise on hand for consumers to purchase for signatures. How many different Sharpies will you need? How will the athlete get to/from your store? What if there are still people in line with the signing session is supposed to end? These are just some of the issues you'll be asked to address on signing day, so be prepared.
- **Minor stars are major draws** – Don't assume that superstar athletes or retired Hall of Famers are the only options for successful autograph sessions. Minor league athletes, retired players who are now coaches, broadcasters for the local team, or even former college stars from local schools can attract crowds to your store.
- **Utilize the local media** – Obviously, you should consider advertising a signing session with your local media outlets. But you should also notify the local media and invite them to cover the appearance. It's a great way to build recognition for your business.
- **Hire extra staff** – One of the biggest mistakes store owners make is not having enough staff on hand for an event. For instance, you'll need people for controlling the line, people selling merchandise, people sitting with your guest to take autograph tickets (if you're using them), someone to answer the phone. As the store owner, you need to supervise the entire process.
- **Offer a variety of merchandise** – Sure, people will bring their own items to get signed, but some will look to you for balls, photos, helmets or whatever may be appropriate for your guest. Make sure you have a variety of items available for customers to purchase. Also be sure to have your guest sign some additional items that you can sell to customers who could not make it to your event.
- **Promote** – Having an athlete in your store is a big deal. Make sure your current customer base knows when a signing will take place, but also get the word out to a wider audience. Signings are a great way to introduce new customers to your store and give them another reason to make the trip to your shop.

- **Brag it up** – After the event, make sure you post photos, news clippings and any other souvenirs from your event for customers to see. Hosting an autograph session adds a new level of credibility to your store and will get customers asking about being a part of future events. Make sure local media is aware of the event.

In-store signing sessions are not only a great way to boost sales, they also help set your store apart from the competition. If you're looking for an event that will wow your customers, start making plans for an in-store autograph session.