

## Utilizing Merchandising and Out-of-the-Box Promotions

If you want to sell more products, you have to create a desire in the minds of your customers to make a purchase. That's what successful salespeople in any industry do best. In the world of retailing, the best way to increase sales is by utilizing effective merchandising and promotional techniques. Getting your products in front of consumers is the best way to motivate them to spend money. But remember – these concepts must be put into place on a consistent basis.

- **Eye appeal** – Merchandising refers to the concept of promoting the sale of goods through their visual presentation. Sports collectibles have tremendous visual appeal, yet many hobby stores hide products behind their counters or high on shelves where they can't easily be seen by most customers.

If you want people to notice specific items in your store, you have to draw their attention to those items. Create a special new release section where customers go first to see new items, similar to what's done in a video store. Not only is it a great way to create a first destination, it can also pull them to other products. Higher-end collectibles like autographed memorabilia should be displayed in a way that resembles a museum or gallery.

- **Rotation, rotation, rotation** – Once you've created some nice visual displays of merchandise, the best way to maximize those displays is by rotating new items into those displays. At the very least, rotate new items into your displays to coincide with each of the major sports seasons. Themed displays are also a great way to boost gift sales around the holidays. Get in the habit of creating displays and rotating new items into those displays and you'll probably get customers into the habit of coming in just to see what's new.

- **Breaking the mold** – You've probably been in business long enough to know which promotions work well for your store and those that don't. But it's probably also true that your store is always looking for a way to attract new customers. That's why it's important that you keep coming up with promotional ideas to attract the attention of those who aren't aware of your business. Out-of-the-box thinking means trying something you, or even your competitors, have never tried before and perhaps something your customers aren't expecting to see.

Some possible ideas include a live radio remote from your store, a midnight madness sale, a store tailgate party before a big televised game, or a group outing to a local minor league park. Whatever you choose, make sure it's promoted beyond your traditional customer base and leaves customers with a positive impression of your store as an entertaining place to visit. You can also create various in-store competitions, ranging from trivia contests to fantasy sports to team-set building events from new releases.

- **Grab a partner** – Creating effective promotional ideas is sometimes easier when you team with another local business. For instance, work with a local bowling establishment to host a tournament just for your customers. Partner with a local pizza restaurant to offer a pack of basketball cards during every pizza ordered during March Madness.

- **Plan in advance** – The most effective promotions require planning. Sit down and look at a calendar for the next 12 months. Pencil in dates and, if possible, themes of at least one promotional ideas per month. You can always adjust dates and times if necessary, but knowing what events you have and when will force you to begin making plans in advance.

- **Be spontaneous** – Even though most events require planning to be successful, don't be afraid to try some spur-of-the-moment promotions. For instance, when schools are closed in your area due to weather, have a "Snow Day Sale" to promote purchases of lower-priced cards or Yu-Gi-Oh! items. E-mail marketing is a great way to promote last-minute specials, so make sure you keep your e-mail database up to date.

Getting creative with merchandising and promotional ideas is not only important, it's a lot of fun as well. The more effort you put into creating unique displays and promotions, the better the results.