

Retail SOS: Quick Marketing & Merchandising Tips for Your Retail Business

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I'm sure by now, you've got your window displays in place and are eager to welcome holiday shoppers. If your store is already considered a "destination" that's great! I know you worked hard to position your store as a destination. If you rely more on walk-in traffic, then your windows are one of your most important assets to help attract new customers and will encourage existing customers to return.

Now, more than ever your windows need to entice your would-be customers to come in and make purchases quickly and efficiently. Here's a checklist for you to use to make sure your marketing and window displays are working in your best interest to generate sales.

1. **Create a "theme"** for your windows and carry it through with fun and color. If you're a gift shop and carry products for men, women and children, create displays for each of those segments. Create vignettes "For the Woman Who Has Everything", "Latest Gadgets for the Guy in Your Life", "Toys to Enthrall Your Child", "For the Cook in Your Life", etc.
2. **Improve your curb appeal** by creating a jovial atmosphere outside as people stand in line to enter the store – play holiday music and have aromatic scents of the season waft through the air.
3. **Use lights** - can lighting and spotlights are a great way to showcase and emphasize a special product. Lighting also helps to create mood and atmosphere. Use it wisely. Leave window lights on after store hours to attract and entice window shoppers.
4. **Promote your bestsellers** front and center. If you already know they will fly out the door, why not gift wrap them ahead of time? Saves time for both you and your customer. Combine bestsellers with an "up-sale" item. If your bestseller is a winter hat – offer it with matching accessories such as gloves or a scarf.
5. **Consider grouping gift ideas with certain price points together.** Depending on your merchandise, include displays for gifts under \$25, \$50, \$100, etc. This will help those indecisive customers move through your store quickly and efficiently.
6. **Let your windows work for you even when you're not open.** Make sure you include the URL for your store's website conspicuously on your front windows. Don't bury it in small letters on the side of your window. Be sure to include the store's hours and phone number on your entrance door as well as the availability of private appointments if you offer that service.
7. **Make sure your website is updated** and has an easy to use shopping cart. Incentivize your online shoppers by offering special deals for online shoppers only. Offer free or flat rate fee shipping, at the very least.
8. **Make it easy for your customers to find you** by making sure your SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is up-to-date. Update your key words regularly. This is not a one-time only

endeavor. SEO needs to be done monthly or quarterly, at the very least – especially if you’re getting new merchandise in that customers are looking for.

9. **Your Logo is Part of Your Brand** – Use it! Let your customers help promote your store. Include your logo on bags, labels, gift wrap, on the ground to designate 6 feet spacing and even on masks. Consider having masks with your logo imprinted on them and include it as a “gift with purchase”. Who doesn’t love getting a free gift?
10. **Consider co-promotions with other neighborhood stores.** Develop strategic alliances with other stores that don’t directly compete with you. Ask if they will give out coupons for your store and offer to hand out coupons for their store with every purchase.
11. **Tap into your Neighborhood Merchants’ Association.** What are they doing to promote the neighborhood’s stores? Ask and participate where possible.
12. **Use your customer mailing list!** What? You don’t have one? Then by all means, start one now! Offer a drawing of a lovely item from your store in order to capture names and email addresses. Send out promotional emails that announce new products, services and sales. Let them know you’re offering free gift wrap or discounted shipping.
13. **Build a relationship with your customers!** It’s easier to keep an existing customer than finding a new one. Keep your customers coming back again and again by building a relationship with them.
14. **Contact the SBDC for free advisory services.** The advisors at the Small Business Development Center are here to help your business thrive in these trying times. They can help you find grants and loans, as well as offer assistance with marketing, social media, retail merchandising, HR and bookkeeping. The Center is sponsored by the SBA and the City’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development. They are here to help. Go to: <https://nc.ecenterdirect.com/signup> to sign up for our services.