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Falling Into A Fall Promotion Mode

**Small retailers use fall celebrations to
stimulate business.**



Between Labor Day/Back-to-School specials and the Christmas/Hanukkah holiday, a lot of retailers seem to take a rest from special promotions. Either they start their Christmas holiday promotions right after the kids are back in school or they don't do much at all in the way of special holiday promotions during the fall.

But they might be missing some great opportunities, especially around Halloween and Thanksgiving.

Fall can be a great time for retailers to give customers a special reason to come into their stores. In many parts of the country, falling

temperatures mean consumers are spending less of their free time outside. Comfortable retail environments that engage consumer interests can provide a great opportunity for individuals and families to check out new product offerings and pick up items that excite their interests.

Additionally, with a new school year beginning and weather changing, fall is a great time for individuals to re-examine what items they have

in their closets and cupboards. Older, damaged or ill-fitting items are often tossed or recycled and these individuals then use fall as the time to think about what they will need in the coming months.

Retailers that are in-tune with their customers' fall-planning schedules can use this opportunity to provide their customers with valued necessities and services, as well present them with new possibilities and interests.

► **Halloween For Adults**

The fall holidays themselves present a lot of potential for retailers. One mistake some retailers often make is to think of Halloween as a "kid's holiday" where the only special things purchased are costumes, a few decorations and candy.

But the days of only kids celebrating Halloween by trick-or-treating are gone. "Halloween has become a big holiday in the scheme of celebrations and not just with children," says George Whalin, a Carlsbad, California-based retail consultant who has written

“We want to be out there and create an awareness about our store, so customers keep thinking about us.”

numerous books on retailing. “More and more adults are celebrating Halloween with parties and get-togethers.”

This poses numerous opportunities for retailers that sell such products as clothing, gift items, food, alcoholic beverages and other related party items, Whalin explains. “Halloween generates a significant number of sales for retailers that see it as an opportunity to get adult customers in their stores.”

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You don’t have to sell Halloween-related products to take advantage of Halloween time. Tres

Mariposas, a high-end store that sells women’s clothing and accessories in El Paso, Texas, uses Halloween as an excuse for another celebration. In years past, for example, the store had a pumpkin-carving contest in which customers were invited to bring in a carved pumpkin to win a prize. The pumpkins were then displayed in the store.

Creative retailers can find other ways to get customers interested in promotions that revolve around pumpkins, witches and costumes.

› **The Lost Thanksgiving**

Another lost holiday in the retail world is Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving in itself may not generate a lot of gift-buying, outside of a very small number of hostess gifts and a few centerpieces. So except for food stores and a few housewares stores, it doesn’t appear to have a lot of potential for retailers. But after-Thanksgiving holidays are another matter.

Successful retailers find ways to transition customers away from Thanksgiving to thinking about the upcoming Christmas season. Tres Mariposas, for example, holds an “After-Thanksgiving Extravaganza,” when it provides customers with ten great things to do at the store immediately after the holiday. Among the special offerings are gourmet goodies which are given away with the explanation that the customers need to “give their turkey leftovers a break,” explains Nan Napier, store owner. In addition to offering customers a gastric alternative, the store hands out \$25 gift cards that customers can use

when they make a purchase of \$100 or more between December 1 and 24.

Besides Halloween and Thanksgiving, Tres Mariposas celebrates another fall holiday of sorts—Election Day. On this November holiday last year, the store had a “Tired of the Election Madness” party where customers were encouraged to relax and enjoy the day with a nonpartisan party. Napier explains that she did not want to have the party immediately after Election Day as to give members of any political party the idea that the store was celebrating any particular election outcome. That could potentially alienate members of the losing party, she says.

› **Creating Your Own Holidays**

While clothing, food and small gift shops might seem to get the most bang for the buck during the fall holidays, high-end retailers do find ways to get customers into their stores during the fall. But sometimes they have to create their own fall celebrations.

Bloomington, Illinois-based Jack Lewis Fine Jewelry plans to offer at least one special event during each month this fall. Although these events are not tied to specific fall holidays, they create special occasions in which to connect with customers. “We want to be out there and create an awareness about our store so customers keep thinking about us,” says John Carter, the store’s chief operating officer.

While the fall holidays may not be associated with jewelry sales as much as other holidays, particularly such holidays as Christmas, Valentine’s Day, and Mother’s Day, the store gives its customers other reasons to visit the store or talk to its personnel.

As one example, the store will bring in a popular California jewelry designer to visit with top customers during a luncheon. The designer will give a presentation on the newest designs and talk about what goes into a jewelry design.

“Our customers have a good time and see the designer’s latest collection,” Carter explains. After the luncheon, the customers are invited that evening to a cocktail reception where they can bring

their spouses or significant others. The designer will talk to customers about specific products and customers can request custom designs.

Another example of what Jack Lewis has done in the past to create a special event, is it invited customers who had purchased Pandora charm bracelets to a special pastry desert and wine-tasting party where customers can view some of the newest charms and compare their bracelets with those of other Pandora collectors.

Key to the success of these events is getting the word out to the right customers. Jack Lewis promotes its “by invitation only” events through post cards and emails. Public events are promoted through a combination of print ads, post cards and emails. The store takes pains to make sure its image and message is consistent throughout all these communications.

But getting the most out of email requires that a store collect an extensive list of customers’ email addresses. Carter says his jewelry store has been able to expand its base of customer emails by offering customers the opportunity to enter a raffle if they provide their email addresses. “A lot of people are protective of their email addresses, but they will generally give it out if they get something in exchange,” he explains.

Tres Mariposas also finds unique ways to throw event-driven parties all year around. Fall, especially as mothers send their kids off to school, might be a good time for one of the store’s “pamper parties.” During these parties, groups of friends are invited into the store during off hours, where they are treated to a facial, a massage and a fashion show.

So whether it is a real holiday, like Halloween and Thanksgiving, or an event created by a retailer, fall events can be a great way to get interest in your store and get customers in the door.