

7 tips for Halloween and Thanksgiving Sales

By Jeff Wuorio

"Merry Christmas!" "Happy Hanukah!"

Those two expressions spell opportunity for a vast array of small businesses — an opportunity to connect with customers on a special level.

But what about "Boo!"? Or, for that matter, "Pass the candied yams"?

Outside of candy stores and turkey-baster emporiums, Halloween and Thanksgiving may seem rather lightweight in terms of the sort of singular sales muscle that holidays such as Christmas and Hanukah offer. But there's more potential than meets the eye, provided you approach them with a fresh viewpoint.

Here are seven ways to do just that:

1. **Emphasize family.** Halloween seems light years away from Christmas in terms of focus. But both of these holidays — and Thanksgiving, for that matter — share a powerful common ground: a vehicle that brings families together. Bear that in mind when considering any sort of special marketing or sales program. "Halloween isn't just about trick or treating and Thanksgiving isn't just about big meals," says David Fields, managing director of Ascendant Consulting of Ridgefield, Ct. "They have both become significant events on the calendar because they satisfy the urge for family experiences."
2. **What does it mean to celebrate?** Halloween and Thanksgiving celebrations certainly are nothing new. But don't limit your thinking to worn out stereotypes. Move beyond apple bobbing contests and feeding jags to envision ways that consumers may potentially mark the holidays. "For instance, pets are often considered part of the family. A savvy pet products marketer would make sure that Spot isn't left out when Thanksgiving arrives," says Fields. "Also, many families play games — charades, Pictionary and the like. Why aren't retailers promoting that category for Thanksgiving under the 'make this family get-together the most fun ever' message?"
3. **Host Halloween and Thanksgiving celebrations** — and make them part of a pattern. Any business can decorate the workplace or hold Halloween or Thanksgiving parties. The important distinction is to make them part of an ongoing program of holiday events — celebrations that customers remember and anticipate. "Let people know that whatever type of event or promotion you are having will be repeated again for the next big holiday," says Louis Lautman, author of "31 Days to Awaken Your Creative Sales Genius." "People will come to see what you do next. That way you'll become the business that always throws the great holiday bashes."
4. **Try to set your celebrations apart.** One potential pitfall to Halloween and Thanksgiving to-dos is similarity — the risk that yours is just another business tossing around the same Zag-nut bars every Oct. 31. If you plan to celebrate, try to do it in a

special, memorable way. For instance: if your business has a substantial ethnic mix, include foods specific to those cultures in your celebration. Consider handing out something other than the run of the mill Halloween candy, such as inexpensive toys. Use Office Small Business Management Edition 2006 to create multimedia presentations highlighting the holiday that can be placed onto your website. "Look around at what the people want in your area, look at what other competitors and like businesses have done with these holidays and others to create interest," says Lautman. "The key is to make it a 'can't miss' type of event."

5. **More give, less take.** One of the inherent marketing advantages of holidays such as Christmas is the opportunity for generosity — programs and efforts that help others and, in so doing, establish a bedrock of respect with the community. Don't overlook the same potential in Thanksgiving and Halloween. "A fresh way to connect with customers would be to host an off-location event like sponsoring a meal for the homeless on Thanksgiving," says Lautman. "For Halloween, go to a hospital in costumes and visit kids who cannot leave."
6. **As you celebrate, keep an eye on inventory.** Items highly specific to the holidays, such as certain types of food and decorations, are central to any Halloween and Thanksgiving celebration. That makes inventory maintenance another planning caveat. While you want to be certain you're adequately supplied, overstocks may mean items that will languish for close to a year. Monitor inventory patterns from past holidays — products such as Microsoft Point of Sale can help you gather comprehensive data to make sure that inventory is sufficient but not so overwhelming as to result in dead weight and needless storage expenses.
7. **Don't assume they're "unimportant."** One overriding challenge to Halloween and Thanksgiving is a perceived lack of "importance" — while holidays such as Christmas are naturally significant, others seem less so. Don't get needlessly bogged down with that baggage. By tossing aside that assumption and working to build a sense of value and expectation, you can transform Halloween and Thanksgiving into memorable events — for both you and your customers. "Retailers and manufacturers don't need to be convinced of whether a holiday is more or less important — they only need to see an opportunity to promote their products in a way which creates value for the consumer and builds sales for themselves," says Fields. "If a company provides value — making a customer think 'Wow, this will make my family have so much more fun on Thanksgiving!' then they are ahead of the game."

October, 2006