

CHRISTMAS SHOW SUCCESS

These eight steps can lead to successful showroom purchasing.

By Ralph Gaudio



Photos courtesy of AmericasMart Atlanta.

Holiday and gift trade shows are loaded with many unique, keystone items that will present the opportunity for your organization to make a profit, increase turns and preserve your image as “the push the envelope” holiday retailer. The challenge for your buying team is to identify a limited number of products that will be right for you. The onus will be on your buying team to be sharp, creative, open minded, cutting edge and most importantly dollar conscious.

The following is a guideline I give to new buyers in the industry to help them through their first buying trip to a Christmas show.

Create a trip schedule. The first order of business when planning any buying trip is to determine what shows will be the most beneficial for your team to attend. There are many shows each year, and you obviously cannot attend every one. Research vendors and products, and only attend shows that are critical to your organization’s needs. Many holiday manufacturers exhibit at the main gift shows, and if you are really heavy into Christmas, you may want to consider one of the Christmas shows, such as the New York toy show. We regularly attend shows in New York, Atlanta and Dallas.

Pre-register and obtain information. Once you have a schedule, make sure that your buying team is pre-registered for all the shows you will be attending. One person can usually register for the whole group. Have the shows send out their directory books and show specials beforehand. This allows you to highlight the vendors you absolutely need to visit as well as some new vendors that pique your interest.

As simple as this task sounds it will save you a great deal of time upon arriving at the show. Having a game plan predetermines the mindset of your team and provides you with a roadmap to successful purchasing.

Peruse the show, and cut your preliminary deals. Upon arrival, we find it best to walk the show as a team. When we break for lunch we discuss what we have seen and brainstorm back and forth. Armed with their budgets, plan-o-grams and overall location layout, our buyers then embark upon finding the best merchandise along with the best deals for their category. Whether it be terms, a larger discount, free shipping or free display fixtures, incentives are a big part of buying at trade shows, and each of our buyers has been well schooled in the art of “obtaining add ons.” At most shows your buying team can push the vendors for extra benefits that are essential to a successful purchase. My buying team is taught not to return without some type of add-ons above and beyond the general program being offered.

Individual buyer’s responsibility. Each buyer is responsible for returning with at least one can’t-miss item, one sleeper item and one cutting-edge item. These can be simple items that a sharp buyer feels will sell like crazy. For example, five years ago at a show in New York one of our buyers found optic holiday glasses. These were glasses that the consumer put on and viewed Christmas lights. The glasses would enable the wearer to view all types of holographic images. This seemingly simple purchase met two criteria: sleeper and cutting edge. We sold 3,000 pairs at \$1.99 that

first season with a profit of \$1.10 per pair. Your buyers need to be both market savvy and courageous. Unique, state-of-the-art items are what is going to keep your organization at the forefront of the retail industry.

Hold an end-of-day meeting. While our buyers will cut their best deals throughout the buying day, they do not purchase until attending an end-of-the-day meeting. Even though each buyer has their individual responsibilities, we meet to make sure there are no overlapping purchases. An end-of-day meeting is also beneficial in that you can bounce ideas off one another once again. If a major purchase is suggested at these meetings it is imperative that we all communicate so that we can adjust another category's budget if need be.

Communication is vital. We usually allocate several days for a purchasing trip, and purchases are only made the day after the evening meeting; therefore, we are able to discuss spatial relationships such as our ability to warehouse the new merchandise and where and when it will go on the floor. We also have another chance to reiterate the importance of each buyer remaining within their budgeting parameters. Communication during a buying trip, as in any relationship, is absolutely a necessity. The group remaining on the same page with the same purchasing goals is vital.

Best laid plans. Even the most well-planned trips run into a few bumps along the road. The most common is running out of time. If your team has not been able to visit all the vendors they had planned, have them invite the missed vendors to send a local rep to your store. Make sure your buyers still push for "purchase add-ons" even though you are no longer purchasing at the show.

No place like home. Upon returning from your trip hold two meetings: One with your buying team to once again review all purchases and pertinent information; the second with your entire staff to acquaint and inform them of what they can expect to sell the upcoming season. This will not only familiarize them with the

product, it will also make the entire staff feel involved in the new purchases.

Do your research, create a game plan, work the vendors, source unique items and oh yeah, be ready to work from morning to night.

Follow the aforementioned steps and you can guarantee yourself a successful, profitable buying excursion. ❄️

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ence. He can be reached by phone at (856) 983-3300 or E-mail at gaudioboys@aol.com.

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