

# 7 WAYS TO SELL THE ULTIMATE GIFT



By Christina Salwitz

**W**hat would you say if I told you that you already possess the one small item in your store that any employee can sell easily with zero knowledge of eco-friendly matters multiple times daily and it costs you only a fraction of what you have the potential to take in from it?

Got ya thinking huh? I'll give you hints ... it's bird, bug and beast friendly, no one needs any plant or fertilizer knowledge to enjoy it, and it fits in your wallet.

Got it yet? Yes, it's the gift card.

If you sold them hand over fist this year then good for you. As retail expert Kevin Graff says, "Gift cards are God's gift to retail." Unfortunately, it seems they have been a harder sell for many independent garden centers lately.

But, to boost those post-holiday sales, the gift card is your best friend in an eco-friendly gift. So, let's look at some creative ways to help sell more of them and maybe some reasons you're not selling as many as you could be.

- Gift cards don't take up much space, which is great if you're trying to save space on your counter, but that also means they can be visually "lost" as well.
- Gift cards provide new customers a chance to get to know you as well as giving return customers a reason to come back in more seasons through the year. According to Graff, "51 percent of respondents in a recent survey said that receiving a gift card prompted them to visit a store more often than they would have otherwise."

- Gift cards are an efficient option for returns and exchanges for merchandise.
- Gift cards encourage shoppers to spend more than the amount on the card, as much as 20 percent more in many cases.

From everyone's perspective, gift cards are an easy solution, but getting customers enthusiastic to purchase them from you can be challenging.

We need to dance past the perception that gift cards are impersonal or last minute. That statement might be true for many people, especially the last-minute part. Yet, this is also why it is so eco-friendly and doesn't require any fancy wrapping or bow-making skills!

Here are ideas to help spur more gift card sales in 2018:

1. Make sure they're seen. Most retailers adopt a passive approach when selling their gift cards. According to Graff, merchants often practice benign sales work when it comes to these cards: "They're there, and if a customer asks for it, then they'll sell it to you."

Up near the register is ideal for obvious security reasons, but beyond that, don't be subtle! Get those creative juices flowing with signage and even the gift cards themselves.

Theme them out for various topics and dates like you might see with stamps: collector's edition tree-themed cards for Arbor Day, for the new baby, retirement, you get the idea. If not the card itself, how about the envelope or box it comes in?

Some more ideas include cards for birders paired with a bag of bird seed or a feeder, cards for the

tool junkies that come with a sharpener. Imagine what you could do for Valentine's Day. Pair the gift card with a little heart-shaped candy box of mini-succulents! The ideas are endless ...

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2. Associate your gift cards with best-selling products. Are \$100 pink dogwood trees the hot seller at Mother's Day? How about a sign in the trees that reminds the customer that \$100 gift cards (with a pretty pink dogwood flower on it) are available at the register too? Whatever that product might be, there's no reason not to have your unique and entertaining signage working for you as a silent sales person.
3. Your gift card sales force is your über creative staff; incentivize them! Early in the year is a perfect time to get creative juices flowing and practiced on ideas to sell more gift cards. Make Mother's Day week the goal to sell X dollar's worth of gift cards. A contest between department teams would be entertaining and enlightening too. The prizes can be for groups or individuals; make it fun but also challenging for their sales skills.

It's as simple as asking if the customer needs any potting soil or fertilizer or any other typical



add-on sales. But, adding a source for competition and even more for rewards brings out the best ideas. Offer scalable rewards too; the more you sell, the bigger the win.

4. Let's face it; gift cards are not always sexy to sell. Then let's make it super groovy on your social media, ecommerce and email blasts.

Video, cartoon posts, gorgeous photography, poems, puns and all manner of lighthearted enthusiasm help your social media posts to sell more. On the flip side, you can use gift cards to help propel charity sales, fund gardens for kids and so much more. The main idea here is to keep drip, drip, dripping the idea out in your regular social media routine in ways that are anything BUT ordinary.

5. Find as many ingenious ways as you can to personalize every single gift card or gift card container/envelope. Origami, calligraphy, animals, weather, tools, up-scaled/recycled, whatever your unique idea is, rotate it out every so often.

Make the customer who bought a gift card for Aunt Judy last year wonder what clever idea or theme you've come up with for this year and imagine the smile they will have together giving and receiving it.

6. If you are challenged at selling more gift cards, are you offering BOTH plastic gift cards as well as e-gift cards? E-gift cards are gaining ground over plastic for very eco-friendly reasons and more. They have several advantages compared to plastic gift cards:
  - You can easily implement an e-gift card program on your business website in just hours, compared to ordering and waiting for plastic gift cards.
  - E-gift cards appeal to young consumers who do everything on their phones and can't fathom lugging around a plastic card.
  - E-gift cards can be purchased literally at the last minute (the morning of!) and instantly emailed to recipients — a boon for last-minute shoppers and your sales.
  - E-gift cards appeal to customers who don't want to deal with holiday crowds just to buy a plastic gift card.
  - When a customer purchases an e-gift card, you capture their information as well as the recipients'. This means you can continue marketing to the customer and recipient with new offers.
7. Use gift cards to reward loyal customers. If you have a loyalty program in place, try using gift cards instead of or in addition to discounts. Gift cards have higher perceived

value than discounts, so they're more successful at getting customers into your business. **LGR**

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## THINGS TO CONSIDER: IS YOUR WEBSITE HELPING OR HURTING SALES?

It is clear that retailers need to harness online sales through their websites in order to drive profits for their businesses in the future. With an average value of \$99.35 per online order on a tablet and \$131.62 on a computer in the U.S. during the second quarter of 2017, online sales have increased 4 percent over 2016 and 38 percent over 2015, according to Statista's reports released September 2016 and November 2017. By having a successful website and easy-to-use e-commerce, you're also expanding your customer base to North America or the whole world, depending on how you set up your site.

While it's sometimes easy to judge whether or not you have a successful website by your traffic or sales, there are other factors Google and your customers consider when choosing your website or your competitor's:

1. **The basics.** Can customers find your phone number right away? What about your location? Make sure that both are visible on every page of your website. Does your logo appear prominently? If not, be sure to upload the logo. Do you have a blog? Social media? Be sure links to those pages are included on your homepage (and social media is featured on every page!).

2. **Who you are.** Can customers tell what your business is all about within a few seconds of visiting your website? If not, tailor the copy on the homepage to better describe your business.

3. **Ease of use.** Walk through the website as your customers would to see how easy it is to use. Have you ever tried using your own e-commerce set-up? How many clicks does it take to get to your web store once you're on the homepage? Can you easily add items to the cart? Can you get to the cart with one click? Does it give you any hassle when you try to make a purchase? Conventional wisdom is that if it takes more than one click to get to your store or if a link to your store is not on your homepage, people won't seek it out or buy online from you. And if you don't have current product on your web store or if items are out of stock, you will lose out on those sales entirely.

4. **Search feature functionality.** Try searching for your top-sellers with the terminology that customers use when they ask for the product in your store. If these items are hard to find, customers probably won't buy

from your website. Alternatively, if they can find what they are looking for quickly and easily, you will capture sales from people who prefer to purchase online!

5. **Mobile friendliness.** Many consumers shop from their mobile devices. Don't miss out on those sales — test your website on an Android, an iPhone and a tablet. Each device will display the site differently. If your website looks like a miniature version of what you see on your computer, you likely don't have a mobile version. In addition to not being user-friendly for mobile users, Google will not rank your site as well as it could be ranked — sending customers elsewhere. If you don't have a mobile website, set one up right away.

6. **Go beyond your shelf space.** Partner with reliable vendors, like Kay Berry, who offer drop-shipping of products you can offer to online shoppers. Customers can go to your website and order products — even one at a time — that you may not be able to offer in your store. Consider covering freight costs (which will be a huge incentive for your customers) by lowering margins or increasing prices by a small percentage. Your local post office has free boxes and the best prices for home delivery, so use them to decrease those shipping costs to reduce the impact on your margins.

7. **Current Sales & Specials.** Are any current offers featured for quick reference? Are expired sales removed? Customers visit your website to find out what your current specials and offerings are. If you're trying to increase traffic at your storefront, add a coupon customers can print and bring in. Conversely, if you're trying to boost web sales, give online-only offers and promote those in your store!

Your website is instrumental to your success both online and at your store. Be sure to keep it updated frequently so your customers check back to see what your current offers are. Since more people are shopping online than ever before, these simple tips can help you provide a way for customers to purchase your products from you online; this will help drive sales and improve your bottom line!

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