

## MANAGEMENT



By Ralph Gaudio

# CREATING AN ANIMATED CHRISTMAS FANTASYLAND

Christmas merchandise is every where during the holiday season, and competition can get tough. Transform your garden center into a Christmas wonderland and watch your sales grow.

Every retailer faces fierce competition in today's Christmas marketplace. Christmas merchandise is now sold through every imaginable outlet. Whether it's drug store chains, home improvement stores or even the local supermarket, everyone wants a piece of the holiday market. As a result of this glut in the marketplace, it is imperative independent retailers carve out their niche and maximize their location's potential.

Exquisitely trimmed trees, unique decorations and breathtaking mystical displays no longer guarantee a successful season. With everyone seeking a piece of the pie, independents must plan, strategize and implement their specific advantages to capture their share of the market.

At G Boys, we have been creating Christmas fantasies since the 1960s. Our goal is to create lasting family memories that are passed down from generation to generation. Each season there are new themes and a new animated fantasyland drawing huge amounts of customers every day. This foot traffic enables us to do 67 percent of our gross revenue in nine weeks.

### Maximize The Potential

The pressure is on and it is up to you and your staff to maximize your location's potential. Here are some basic guidelines to follow when creating your own successful fantasyland.

1. Dedicate the proper amount of square footage for your displays. Most retailers are hesitant to give up revenue-generating square footage. The amount of traffic this room will draw will far outweigh the decrease in floor space while increasing your gross sales.

2. Brainstorm with your staff. Lean on the employees who have the vision to allow you to achieve your goal. Decide on a theme, and take the necessary steps to put the plan in motion. From blueprints, to electricians, to purchasing your building supplies and hiring contractors, to ordering your animation, set your plan in motion early to reduce your stress level in the fall.

3. The initial start-up costs for a fantasyland can seem intimidating. You must fill out the scenes down to the last detail to properly create the fantasy. Do not let the initial outlay weigh heavily on

your decision to go forward. If you change the theme every year, you can readily sell off your animation at the end of the season to recoup your costs and to start fresh the following year.

4. It is imperative to sign the room discreetly so potential collectors realize the scenes are for sale. Train your staff on the nuances of each scene, and only sell the entire scene as a package. Otherwise, you will have individual pieces that have no value to the following year's room.

5. Remember to allot wide aisles and have fire exits to code. Fencing and set back of scenes is critical. Children, while being amazed, are naturally curious. You do not want them to be able to reach the merchandise or, worse yet, injure themselves. Flame-retardant materials and fire codes must be adhered to at all times to pass fire inspection. Make sure your purchasing agents understand this when purchasing supplies.

6. Santa is the star of the show. He should be housed at the end of your animated tour. We set up a professional photograph shop and market everything from Santa photos to custom Santa apparel. Aisles for Santa must be extra wide to accommodate pass-through for those that choose not to visit with Santa and the long lines of excited children who cannot wait to see him.

7. Expect enormous foot traffic and be prepared to accommodate accordingly. We host six busloads daily. Mrs. Clause provides guided tours while children are given free gifts on the way out and parents receive discount coupons for their next visit. That is the key. Entice the children, get them excited and they will beg their parents to return. Market to the parents the added benefit of both their discount coupons and the opportunity to create cherished family memories with their children.

8. Pursue every avenue to advertise and promote your fantasyland. Many local newspapers have holiday "what to do" sections where you can list your room. Attract local news teams to your place by calling their marketing departments and they will come out and do free segments from your location. If you become the local Christmas expert, news outlets will use your store for location shots of holiday segments while mentioning your store name. Radio stations are also willing to plug your location. These methods do not cost



Changing the holiday theme every year allows you to sell your displays at the end of the season to recover costs and to start fresh the following year.

you anything. Solicit schools via mail for their bus trips. Once the people start pouring in and families make your place a tradition, word of mouth will be your biggest and best advertisement.

### The Bottom Line

Realize you will need to dedicate a portion of your annual advertising budget to the mediums you normally use to advertise. We use television, radio, magazine, mailers and newspaper advertising. Our holiday budget is approximately 40 percent of our annual advertising budget.

We are not reinventing the wheel, but there is a great deal of preparation, perspiration and hard work. Start early, plan often, be willing to adapt on the fly and be ready to reap the benefits of providing what the big box competition can't even begin to imagine — a holiday destination. ❁

*Ralph Gaudio is president and chief executive officer of G Boys Garden, Christmas & Patio Center, Marlton, N.J. He can be reached at (856) 983-3300.*

### LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to [www.lgrmag.com/lm.cfm/lg080708](http://www.lgrmag.com/lm.cfm/lg080708)