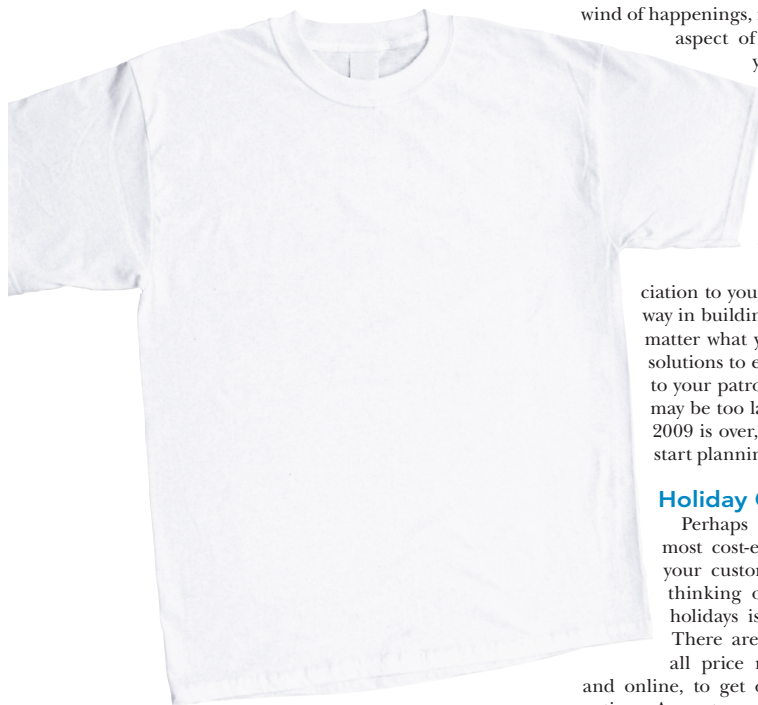


GIFTS

That Keep on Giving

The busy holiday season is a perfect time to let your best customers know how much you appreciate them.

By Janna Benitez



The holiday season is here, and you've got plenty to worry about already. In addition to the usual company business, the holidays bring pressure to sell ornaments, strings of lights, custom wreaths and live trees; organize and staff holiday open houses and events; and juggle events with your own family and friends. It's all "business as usual" as Christmas nears. With this whirlwind of happenings, it is easy to overlook a vital aspect of the business: caring for your customers. Holiday sales will help drive customers to your business for gift and decorating purchases, but this is also a time to thank them for their loyalty during the previous year. Sending or giving a small token of your appreciation to your customers will go a long way in building up customer loyalty. No matter what your budget, here are five solutions to extend a perfect thank-you to your patrons during the holidays. It may be too late to get these out before 2009 is over, but it's never too early to start planning for the future.

Holiday Cards

Perhaps the easiest and most cost-effective way to let your customers know you're thinking of them over the holidays is a holiday card. There are solutions across all price ranges, in stores and online, to get out your season's greetings. A great way to add a personal touch is to personally sign or add a note to each card. If you want to reinforce your brand image, you can also create a card with a wintry image of your business or include your logo on the front or inside of the card. Holiday cards also offer the ability to insert a coupon or

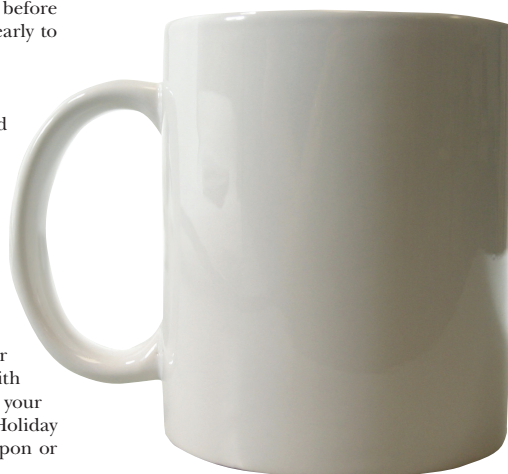
small gift card to help drive additional traffic to your garden center after the holidays.

Reusable Bags

It seems that everyone is ditching paper and plastic bags to jump on the eco-friendly bandwagon. This trend offers a number of unique benefits during the holiday season. The first: You're giving a gift that gives back. Instead of simply giving the bags to your customers, you can charge a nominal fee and donate the proceeds to charity. Even if you decide to give the bags away, you will gain brand recognition whenever you bag is used — in your store, a competitor's shop or just around town. Not only will your customers gain a useful gift, but you'll also gain countless views of your brand.

Calendars

With the holiday season ushering in a new year, there is one gift that all of your customers can use: a calendar. Creating a custom calendar for your business is not only timely, but it also allows you to add key event dates, sales and coupons into each



PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES

Sending your customers little tokens of your appreciation during the busy holiday season is one great way to grab their loyalty for another year. From simple holiday cards to T-shirts personalized with your company's logo, any gesture — regardless of size — will show your most valuable customers that you care about them.



month. To add a personal touch you can also customize pictures to correspond with certain months of the year, like a little league team that you sponsor, a local toy drive, etc. These images offer a glimpse into what your business is all about and enforces the relationship you want to create: You're a friend, not just another business.

Wearables

Everyone loves free shirts and other apparel, especially if it means they can show support for their favorite garden center while sporting their freebies. For the customer, it's a thoughtful gift that's also useful, and for you, it's a moving billboard that will be seen by potential customers all over town. Depending on your customer base and your budget, you can mix and match items like hats, T-shirts and sweat-shirts, or simply stick to the one that fit your business.

Mugs

Perhaps the most-used item in any kitchen cabinet is a coffee mug. Giving a branded mug to your customers will keep your company on the tip of their tongue. If they happen to be considering a major backyard project for the spring or are trying to up their curb appeal for a home sale, there's no better way to open their eyes to your business than with a strong cup of joe. To add a little spice and holiday cheer, you can fill them with candy, a gift card or other goodies before delivering.

No matter what you choose, make sure to take time to thank those who support you all year long. Taking that extra step to make a kind gesture toward your best customers will go a long way in ensuring that they keep coming back next year.

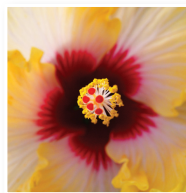
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