



COLLECTIBLES — WORTH YOUR TIME?

Are you collecting your collectibles or selling them?

By Carrie Burns

Ah, remember the days of Beanie Babies? Beanie Baby magazines, books, games — they were everywhere, and everyone wanted them. It was a no brainer to sell them. But, just as fads do, Beanie Babies died down. So, what's the secret with collectibles? How do you know when to say goodbye, how do you know when to stay loyal and how do you get customers to buy them?

STUDY THE GIFT INDUSTRY

Magazines. Just as you read *Lawn & Garden Retailer* to find out all of the latest happenings in the world of garden centers, there are gift magazines that cover the gift industry. While, you wouldn't read it cover to cover, there are many interesting facts that pertain to your gift department. But, most importantly, as the world of collectibles is ever changing, these publications can offer the latest trends and facts. If the collectibles you provide in your garden center aren't doing so hot in most gift shops, it's pretty safe to bid farewell to that space filler in your garden center too.

Some magazines to take a look at are *Gifts & Decorative Accessories* (see sidebar, right), *Giftbeat* and *Custom Gift Retailer*.

Where the People Are. You've most likely been to most of the industry trade shows, but how often do you actually stop at the collectible booths? The industry shows are some of the best places to see what's new. Malls and gift shops are also great places to see what consumers want. Venture through some of your local malls and gift shops to see where the crowds are.

Peers. As are most ideas in this industry, the best ones come from within the industry. Talk to your peers to get a feel of which collections are selling best in stores similar to yours.

SALES

So when it comes to your collectibles, are you doing anything to sell them, or are you just putting them in a glass case and leaving them there to collect dust? Just like your green goods, water garden accessories, etc., collectibles need to be merchandised with signage and other alternatives. Here are just a few suggestions.

Events. Host a monthly or bimonthly event for collectors who purchase collectibles from your store. There are chat rooms and other things out there for people with these kinds of things in common, which goes to show you that people with similar interests love to talk about it. They also love to show off their collections and see what others have that they're missing. You may even get a few extra sales that night if you keep the registers open.

Newsletter. You may already have a newsletter. Create a section in the same place with the same name, look and feel in every issue that's devoted to collectibles. Think of a clever name customers can remember and look for when they get the newsletter in the mail. A few suggestions: Collection Corner, Collector's Corner or Coming Collectibles. Let customers know when you have a new piece in, when one is scheduled to arrive, when your next collector's event is or any other news involving collectibles.

WHAT ARE THEY BUYING?

Gifts & Decorative Accessories collected information from interviews with specialty retailers across the country, asking them for their best-selling merchandise. Some responded by offering their top-selling product categories, while others named their favorite brands.

They found that the top-selling categories within gifts were, in order: candles and accessories; stationary and greeting cards; jewelry; glassware, pottery and ceramics; frames, wall art and mirrors; holiday items; kid's items; books, journals and albums; bags and accessories; angels; personal care; collectibles; furniture; and other gifts, accents and accessories. While it may be a little discouraging to see collectibles near the bottom, many of what our industry considers collectibles are within some of the other categories. Here are some brand names respondents mentioned, listed in alphabetical order.

Candles and accessories

- Blue Sky
- Bridgewater
- Illume
- Kel-Toy
- Trapp
- Tyler
- Votivo
- Yankee

Stationery and greeting cards

- Avanti
- Claudia Cohen
- Crane's
- Ecrie
- Embossed Graphics
- Julie Holcomb
- Marcel Schurman
- Page
- Sweet Pea
- William Arthur

Holiday

- Dept. 56
- Hallmark Keepsake
- Jim Shore snowmen/Enesco
- Jingle Buddies/Roman

Kids

- Boyds Bears
- Celebrity
- Eeboo
- Groovy Girls
- Legos
- Manhattan Toy
- Three Marthas

Bags and accessories

- Brighton
- David and Goliath
- Jon Hart

- Joy & Jake
- Murval
- Vera Bradley

Angels

- Sarah's
- Seraphim/Roman
- Willow Tree/Demdaco

Personal care

- Camille Beckman
- Gianna Rose
- The Thymes

Collectibles

- Charming Tails/Fitz & Floyd
- Hagenrenaker
- Harmony Kingdom
- Just the Right Shoe/Willitts
- Precious Moments/Enesco
- Rinconada
- Swarovski

Other gifts, accents and accessories

- April Cornell linens
- Asiaphile boxes
- Evergreen wood boxes
- Karen Rossi/Silvestri
- Lampe Berger
- Mary Engelbreit licensed products
- NCE windchimes
- Peggy Potter wood bowls
- Pendleton blankets
- Rothschilds gourmet foods
- Sarut Zen garden
- Shira Leah lacquerware
- Silvestri
- Tag
- Toland
- Westland Giftware
- Woodstock windchimes



Pitcher

This hand-painted scalloped pitcher features a lavender floral design around the base and also doubles as a vase. It measures 7½ inches. Andrea by Sadek. (212) 679-8121. **Write in 1450**



Musical frogs

The new Mariachi band features six different musician frogs playing the guitar, trumpet, bass, saxophone, violin and accordion. All frogs are hand-painted and made of ceramic/talavera. Each frog measures 21 x 10 x 16 inches. Frogs can be sold individually or as a set. Masart. (877) 962-7278. **Write in 1459**



Children's gardening tools

Miracle-Gro gardening sets for kids introduce children to gardening. This new Miracle-Gro-licensed product line consists of 10 items at various price points and will be available for spring-summer 2004 with additional products on the drawing board for 2005. Broadway Gardens Co., a division of Broadway Toys, Inc. (212) 924-1212. **Write in 1451** ▶

E-mail. Just like newsletters, E-mail can inform customers of any collectible news. Again, you may already send E-mails, so this could be pretty easy for you to add.

Collectibles are a touchy segment of your business, but with a little work and creativity, it can be a top-selling segment.

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