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- About Us**
- Distribution

Eight Great Ways to Capture Your Share of the Holiday Sales Pie by Carol Arnold

It's hard to believe that in just a few months we will be gobbling down turkey and making a series of mad dashes to the mall for holiday gifts. For most businesses that sell to consumers the busy holiday season is upon you, kids are back-to-school and preparations for Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa have begun. However, like the last couple of years, the economy is down and it is expected that, similar to slow back-to-school sales, this year's holiday sales may be down too. However, with a little knowledge of your customer base, some creativity and some guerrilla action, you can capture your share of the holiday sales pie (or cake!) without having to develop an entirely new product line. Try focusing on the following ideas:

1. The more unique the better - Whether it's advertising in your local paper or product catalogs, around the holidays it is important to remember one central concept. Consumers see much of the same products throughout the holidays yet they want gifts ideas that are different from anything else that is out there. Dare to be different and I promise it will payoff.

2. The power of value-added benefits - If you are a small business trying to compete with the big box giants for holiday business, all is not lost. Evaluate your closest competitors to see where they are missing the boat. Areas where big box retailers are often lacking are in customer service and the availability of unique offerings, and you can capitalize on their downfalls. Consider offering free delivery to your local area like Hampton-based Inventive Parent, whose vans can be seen all over the Seacoast delivering intelligent toys for kids. In addition, ramp up your customer service with people who can offer helpful gift giving suggestions and consider offering free gift wrapping or even a personal shopper. Don't forget to publicize these value-added benefits if you do offer them because they will make you outshine your competition.

3. Holiday media coverage - Every year local and national media alike, from *Yankee Magazine* to *USA Today*, generate editorial driven gift guides and many people use these articles to guide them in their holiday gift purchases. To get your product or service included in such coverage, contact the appropriate reporter or editor at these media outlets and provide them with information

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about your product. Be sure to include the benefits of your product and how it is different from other similar products. A word of caution: many national publications plan their issues months in advance so in some cases, local media may be your best bet.

4. Invite existing customers to purchase again. -Your current customers offer your best shot at getting holiday sales so be sure to make them aware of the unique things that you have to offer. You can contact them using whatever means of contact information you have for them, including postal mail, email or phone. If you have a list of customers that includes their mailing addresses, create and mail a special holiday gift giving flyer which features unique gifts for those hard to buy for people on their list.

5. Evaluate new sales channels. - The holidays are a great time to try new sales channels. There are many options here but consider trying home television shopping giant QVC which, upon evaluation, will freely feature your products. Another option to consider is eBay, which attracts holiday buyers from all over the world looking for both new and used products. However, if you have never sold on eBay, consult an eBay sales expert to learn the ins and outs before embarking on this endeavor. Other considerations should include new retailers, distributors, etc.

6. Special holiday sales or offers - People love sales and free or special offers, especially around holiday time when their wallets are feeling the effects. You don't want to give away the farm but do offer fun sales or special offers that will get prospective buyers coming in your door. Consider midnight madness sales, everything you can fit into a bag for a flat fee, tasting events where people can try before they buy, or invitation-only savings events for current customers, for example.

7. Expand your web presence. < b> - As in previous years, online holiday sales are expected to be tremendous, and if you have a web site from which people can purchase your products, you have won half the battle. To drive traffic to your site, consider starting, refining or increasing your pay per click (see "Using Pay Per Click Search Engines to Increase Your Bottom Line", July issue) search engine marketing to get customers who are looking for your precise product. In addition, consider adding your products to gift finding sites such as www.findagift.net or shopping sites such as www.bizrate.com or Google's new www.froogle.com price shopping site.

8. Partner with local businesses to create special packages. - Let's say you are a New Hampshire company that makes gourmet mustard; consider

contacting manufacturers or vendors of complimentary products in your local area and creating a unique basket or special product offer that people can get only at your store. The key items in this case are uniqueness, maintaining quality and keeping it local. For MANY more ideas, see my article “Share & Share Alike: The Power of Partner Marketing” in the August issue of *Business Beat*.

With these ideas and a positive attitude, you too can capture your share of the holiday sales pie!

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