

Still Not Enough Traffic in the Door

08/03/09

Still Not Enough Traffic in the Door

We're a retail operation, with several stores in nearby towns. It feels like there's life out there, but there's still not enough traffic coming in our door. I'm worried about a seasonal slow down at the end of the third quarter as our target market, moms and dads, focus on getting kids back into their school routine and don't have time to come in and visit us.

This September could be especially hard on retail business. The first week and weekend of September are likely to be considered part of the summer holiday since Labor Day comes so late on September 7. That leaves only three weeks of post-Labor Day shopping in September. Then the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah happens over one weekend, and the evening of Yom Kipper happens on a Sunday, potentially tying up buyers with family plans during those weekends. That leaves only one full shopping weekend and only three weeks of post-summer shopping in the month of September.

Market now to build up traffic for September. Get promotional programs off the ground quickly. Target optimum shopping days. Work with town merchant associations. And don't panic if the month's sales are down.

Make a list of every marketing effort you've tried in the last couple years. Star the ones that have worked best. Add a few new ideas. Consider time-urgent things like a contest, promoting a limited quantity good or service, offering a rebate or discount that expires, bringing in entertainment and holding a special event.

Since this store is focused on moms and dads, rather than children, the owners may consider a "back-to-school, now it's time for you" theme. This can build traffic during the week. Try staying open an extra evening or two during the week to give moms and dads more opportunity to stop in. Set up a kids parking area inside the store, with a high school student to supervise, to give moms and dads a little time to focus on shopping.

In order to draw traffic, explore tie-ins to groups that are all about back-to-school. Offer membership clubs (think Scouts, school clubs, etc.) an opportunity to use the store as an enrollment base. Add a couple limited quantity hot items that kids need or want for back to school and promote the daylights out of them.

Quickly build a following on Twitter. There've been a number of articles recently about how street vendors use Twitter to promote to their followers what they're selling and where they'll be found next. You can do the same. Spend this next week figuring out how Twitter works. Promote your upcoming events to your followers.

Hopefully you've been gathering emails from all of your walk-in traffic. Email them each week, talking about the promotion or event of the week. Use a tracking service like Constant Contact, so that you can find out who's interested in which promotion. Then put out additional promotion information matched to the specific interest of each reader.

Get as much traffic as you can on the good shopping weekend. Make sure that the store is well staffed so that you don't miss a single sales opportunity. Have offer cards on the counter promoting events you'll hold in the store the following two weekends. Use rewards to incent return visits. Give people a reason to come back right away.

Contact the local merchant association. Make them aware of the potential perfect storm of limited selling days in September. Suggest banding together to promote a street fair, or other event to draw traffic. Make up a flier that promotes many of the stores in the area and ask each store to get the flier out to their individual email lists.

Whatever happens, don't panic if September's sales are down. October has five weekends, with only one holiday, plus four full weeks and two days of shopping time. Once children are back in school and the school year routine falls into place, parents are likely to take more time for themselves. Start your October promotions in late September and keep up the push, don't let up.

Think about 2-for-1 offers - come back a second time, or bring in a friend - get something special. In recessionary times people are especially tuned into looking for deals. Appeal to that need.

Remember, promoting your business is a year-round responsibility. You'll have months that are high, others that are low. Set aside reserve funds from high months to get through the valleys. Use marketing to keep the valleys in check. Plan ahead two to three months.

Looking for a good book? Try "Marketing Your Retail Store in the Internet Age" by Bob Negen and Susan Negen.

Business owners regularly turn to Ask Andi and Strategy Leaders for advice on how to grow profitable, successful companies. They find what they need time after time. Specific advice is available at www.AskAndiBlog.com. Ask Andi is also published weekly in the Westchester and Fairfield County Business Journals and Hudson Valley Business. Written by Strategy Leaders President, Andi Gray, the Ask Andi column is a rich source of advice for owners of established, privately held businesses.

*If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call **1.877.238.3535** or send an email to AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com.*