

EIGHT WAYS TO BOOST YOUR VALENTINE'S DAY BUSINESS



What you can do now to maximize sales-floor potential during the big holiday.

BY CINDY HANAUER

Let's face it: No sooner is the "Elf on the Shelf" tucked away than the Valentine's Day season is quickly upon us, pulling on our heart strings and pouncing on every last nerve! Purchase orders are tightly wrapped in the buying system, anticipating millions of dollars in highly profitable sales.

But the Valentine holiday doesn't run on purchase orders alone, does it? Shipping what we order is one thing, but selling what we order is another. January is the perfect time to create a money machine in each of your stores. How do I love salesmanship? Let me count the ways.

1 quick-tip card

Salesmanship is learned. The more educated our employees are, the happier they'll be working in our floral departments and the more comfortable they'll be approaching customers. Have you ever stood behind a service meat counter? Imagine standing there with no training and trying to help customers select the perfect crown roast. A simple recipe card of basic tricks and tips will go a long way in helping sales associates better engage with customers. Better engagement equals better sales.

2 floral selling 101

Schedule a two-hour hands-on training session in the floral department with each new seasonal employee, covering simple instructions such as inflating balloons, watering plants, remerchandising displays, maintaining the department, wrapping and simple upgrading techniques. This training can be efficiently accomplished with a PowerPoint slideshow, infographic or basic webinar.

3 staff scheduling

With numerous employees working in the floral departments during this time, defining each person's role is extremely important. In addition to the days and hours to report for work, a good schedule also includes the daily role of each person, such as back-room processing, sales, wrapping, balloons, cleaning/floor maintenance, stocking and designing. Without their specific roles defined in advance, it's easy for employees to become confused about what to take on when the department becomes busy.

4 advance prep

Advance preparations are the lifeblood of maximum selling and the key to having a quick and efficient sales staff when customers begin to walk through the front door in masses.

Here are five of my favorites:

Fill vases with flower-food solution in advance. Open boxes of vases, fill them with properly dosed flower-food solution, and re-close the boxes so they can be stacked in the back room. The week of the holiday, the cases of solution-filled vases easily can be moved to the sales floor and stacked under the service table for quick chop-and-drop arrangements.

Enlist your cashiers for bow making. Teach some of your cashiers to make bows between serving customers. Instead of cutting each bow apart from the bolt of ribbon, keep the bows connected on the strand of ribbon and drape them on a coat hanger or on a clothesline affixed in a vacant corner of the back room. The bows easily can be taken to the sales floor for quick cut-and-sell upgrading. (Editor's note: Find instructions for making bows in "Workbench Basics" on Page 12 and watch a how-to video at www.superfloral.com.)

Teach cashiers to inflate balloons. Secure two or three helium tanks and bolts of ribbon to the check lanes closest to the floral department, and create a contest to see which cashier can inflate the most balloons between customers. At an average margin of \$1-plus per balloon, organizing a process of inflating hundreds of balloons can add visual pizzazz to the department, hundreds of dollars in profits and thousands of sales dollars to each store.

Get more space. Locate additional cooler space (usually in the dairy cooler), and build additional shelving using milk crates as columns at the four corners, with pallets stacked in between. Cover the pallets with cardboard so product does not fall into the gaps between the pallet boards. Be sure the space between each “shelf” is high enough to load with buckets of flowers and bouquets. You can also build a workstation bench in the back room using this same method.

Plan-o-gram a wrapping station at each store. Locate it between the floral department and the check lanes. Placing a wrapping station inside the department will create a traffic jam of people waiting for their packages to be wrapped and people still trying to select a gift.

A good wrapping table consists of wrapping tissue and upgrade supplies on the tabletop, with shelving underneath created with stacked boxes or milk crates. The wrapping station also should contain wrapping tools, assembled rose boxes and supplies underneath the table. It should have profitable upsells on top, such as picks, stick balloons, baskets, enclosure cards, pens, vases and bows. A good salesperson can sell enough upgrades to cover her or his salary. Build a bouquet display at both ends of the wrapping table for even more impulse sales.

5 the happy zone

The perimeter of each floral department and everything inside it should be deemed a “happy zone.” It’s easy to become rushed and harried as droves of customers enter the department at the last minute, but reminding sales associates that “happy customers spend more” is an important part of their training. Schedules should include regular breaks and lunches, with a relief pitcher scheduled for each position on the schedule.

6 deep-dive for profits

January is a great time for each store to deep-dive into back-room storage areas and pull out everything that can possibly be sold for Valentine’s week. All generic vases, baskets, love balloons, wraps, enclosure cards and anything that’s red, pink, lavender, ivory or white can be sold as potential valentine gifts. In fact, any color can be converted into a valentine gift with smart design work.

7 roll forward, and fill back

An easy way to remember the inventory term FIFO (first in, first out) is to use the term “Roll Forward, and

Fill Back.” This means that as merchandise is sold, the current products on the sales floor are moved to the front, and new product brought from the back room is used to fill the rear of the department. This process continues until all product is out of the back room. It’s a good method to keep the department fresh and also make sure that back-room inventory is routinely brought out to the sales floor.

On the final days of the holiday, managers can assist with this important initiative by setting their phone alarms each hour to make a run through the back room to make sure all product is routinely brought to the sales floor. There’s nothing worse than having an empty sales floor and a full back room.

8 fun and motivational

Valentine’s week is one of the best times to run sales or display contests in your stores. Not only do contests give an incentive to employees to engage with customers but they also create a “happy zone” environment in which employees love to work. One of my favorite valentine contests is called “Chip in for Sales.”

Here’s how it works: Each day of Valentine’s week, a different item is selected, and everyone in the department tries to sell the largest amount of that one item. The selected item usually has a heavier amount of inventory to sell through.

At the beginning of the shift, each employee receives a pocketful of a certain color plastic chip. Every time employees sell the selected item, they drop one of the chips into a large jar under the counter. At the end of the night, the floral manager draws a chip from the jar to select the winner of a gift card or other prize. The more chips one gets into the jar during a shift, the greater her or his chance is of winning the daily prize. On the final day of the holiday, even the store directors can play. This is also a great way to get customers involved through social media.

Indeed, there is a lot of money to be made somewhere between the love and the madness of the holiday. With a little creativity, a lot of motivation and a solid training plan, even a Sunday Valentine’s Day can generate major sales and profits for your company. **sf**

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