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MASTERING MARKETING



Catoctin Mountain Orchard

Photo Credit: Susan Barnes

Get Ready for the Holiday Sales Season Now

While the holiday season may seem a ways off, the line between when customers shop and when they take offense to holiday décor in stores is becoming a blurry one. The National Retail Federation reports that every year, about 40 percent of customers begin their holiday shopping before Halloween⁽¹⁾.

For direct marketing farm retailers, that means determining your marketing strategies and channels before you're done with pumpkins and corn mazes. If you wholesale a product to other retailers, you should start confirming your product inventory and customers' orders now.

Here are several more tips for preparing for the 2016 holiday sales season:

1. Check out your industry's buzz words or what customers are talking about as likely hot sellers this year. Check out your industry's website and publications for this kind of information. Pinterest is an excellent tool for seeing what types of "holiday" items consumers are pinning.
2. Perfect your local presence. Make sure your online listings are current and the contact information, driving directions, and store hours are correct.

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- 3. Review last year’s marketing plan. What worked? What didn’t? Did certain activities draw more of your target customers? What was a waste of time and resources?
- 4. Consider offering gift cards. The National Retail Federation’s Retail Holiday Planning Book notes that in 2015, two-thirds (63%) of shoppers purchased gift cards. 66% of Millennials believe gift cards limit identity fraud and are a safer way to make online purchases ⁽²⁾.

- 5. Develop a written marketing plan for your holiday sales season.

If you are overwhelmed by the task of turning your holiday season marketing plan from a “paper tiger” into a “well-oiled sales engine,” start by developing your own marketing calendar. Preparing to effectively implement your marketing plan helps you be more focused on how and where to spend your marketing dollars.

Here’s a checklist that will help you develop your own holiday season marketing calendar.

✓ **Analyze your inventory.** Take a good look at all the products and services you provide. Are there any offerings that would be more useful with certain holidays such as Thanksgiving, celebrations of faith, or New Year’s events? Organize all your products into specific groups according to their usefulness or tie-ins with specific dates. For example, if you sell items that could be used as Christmas gifts, put them in a special category. If you have other items that are in demand in the rest of winter, put those in a separate category.



✓ **Buy a large desk calendar with lots of room for writing.** Take a colored pen and highlight all the upcoming holidays and any other special events or seasons you want to plan for in the upcoming months. Decide on target dates when you’d like to get an offer out to your current customer list or start a new marketing effort or promotion. Instead of promoting your items a week ahead of a certain holiday or event, you can begin a starter campaign two months before an event and escalate your efforts as the specific day draws near. Put this calendar on the wall of your office so that it is easily visible and can serve as a reminder.

✓ **Plan your implementation.** Decide how you want to promote your items and build your campaign around your decision. If you find you have too many responsibilities to keep on top of your holiday marketing campaign, then assign the duty to someone else in the operation and check in with them regularly. There are 30 shopping days between Thanksgiving and Christmas this year and you shouldn’t miss sales opportunities on any of them.

✓ **Record your results.** Keep a written record of sales, successful events, and comment for improvement for next’s year’s review.

⁽¹⁾ National Retail Federation. <https://nrf.com/resources/holiday-headquarters/consumer-spending-research>.

⁽²⁾ 2016 Retail Holiday Planning Book. <https://nrf.com/resources/retail-library/2016-retail-holiday-planning-playbook>.