



Maximize Your Post Holiday Opportunities

December 24, 2008

“Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another.” - Walter Elliott

I know you're incredibly busy right now but I want you start thinking about the opportunities for the week after Christmas. That's why I wanted to send this Weekly Retail Experience out a day early.

I believe that high executing retailers can beat last year's numbers for the last week of December if they have their staff focused on turning returns into sales and shoppers into buyers.

I also believe that consumers who have been cautious this holiday will cut loose right after Christmas. Shoppers will be looking to spend those Gift Cards they received and exchange those unwanted presents for something else. **A staff with a post-holiday positive attitude has the best opportunity to create positive post-holiday results.**

A retailer once said to me that returns are “just a fact of life” and you have to “grin and bear it.” I agree with him about the importance of the grin but I differ about the need to “bear it.” All retailers will have returns after Christmas; how the retailer handles those returns can ultimately determine their month.

There are three common mistakes retailers make when it comes to holiday returns:

1. They assume the customer wants a refund. Wrong.
2. If the customer doesn't have a receipt, or they have a gift receipt, the retailer assumes that the customer will only spend the amount of the product they're returning. Wrong.
3. They assume that if they can just break even on the few days after Christmas they are doing well. Wrong.

With the right approach to handling post-holiday returns, a retailer can not only save sales but create them as well. **This year we are again recommending that your staff members know and execute the “Three I's with a Smile” approach to handling returns and exchanges.**

1. Intercept all customers before they get to the counter. Greet them with a warm smile, a heartfelt “welcome” and an offer to take the return from them. In most stores associates rarely do more than point toward the counter any customers who are seeking to make a return. This is not only a big mistake that ends up increasing the amount of returns, but it makes the person with a return feel less important than person making a purchase.

Try to engage the customer as close to the door as possible without making them feeling accosted. **If a customer gets to the counter un-engaged your chance of saving the sale is greatly decreased.**

2. Identify why the customer is making a return. Since you are assuming the customer will make an exchange (and quite possibly spend even more money) listen carefully to what they say as you will gain information that will u help your next step be the correct one. **One important thing you need to know is whether the person returning the product is the original buyer or received the item as a gift.**

3. Influence the customer by suggesting or recommending products that will better meet their needs than the product they are returning. The customer may object to this and state that he/she just wants a refund. With a smile and the information you’ve gained from your identify step you can easily try to overcome the objection by stating what you’ve learned from them. **I think we owe to the customer and ourselves to always try and overcome at least one refund objection.** This can save a retailer thousands of dollars in returns. If the customer objects again, then of course you escort them to the counter and get their return handled cheerfully and efficiently.

A store manager of mine use to say, “Any retailer can make buying something a good experience for a customer, but it takes a GREAT retailer to do the same with a return or an exchange.” When done well, the return or exchange will be a GREAT experience for both the customer and the store.

Here’s wishing a Merry Christmas - or Happy Hanukkah - or if you have no holiday preference a Happy Day!

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"Wow. You were awesome. Your words of wisdom on leading and managing store teams was exactly what our managers needed." - Laura Y. (National Retailer)

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