



The Weekly Retail Experience



Post Holiday Success: Maximizing the Season of Me

December 22, 2010

The results you achieve will be in direct proportion to the effort you apply. - Denis Waitley

On the day after Christmas, retailers move into what I call the *Season of Me*. Customers will descend on your store for the next two weeks armed with gift cards, cash, and a strong desire to buy for their favorite person, themselves. Many of them will also be carrying gifts to return and/or exchange.

The key to a successful Season of Me is creating opportunities and increasing sales. Far too many retailers go into the post-holiday season dreading the prospect of dealing with returns and exchanges. That attitude is a recipe for creating nothing. Every customer who walks into your store, for whatever reason, is an opportunity to create a sale and deliver an extraordinary experience that will bring that person back throughout the coming year.

Look at your customers who come in with a return or exchange as an opportunity, not inconvenience. Think sales and experience, not refunds. Think turning returns into dollars.

Don't assume the customer wants a refund. Don't assume the customer will only spend the value of the product they're exchanging. And most important, don't assume that you can't finish in the black this weekend. All it takes is an approach I call Three "I"s with a Smile.

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 ignore customers with refunds, or at the very least just point them to the counter. This is not only a big mistake that ends up increasing the amount of returns, but makes the person with a return feel less important than the person making a purchase. Try to engage the customer as close to the door as possible without making them feeling accosted.

2. Identify why your customer is making a return or exchange. Since you are assuming the customer will make an exchange and probably spend even more money, listen carefully to what he says in order to gain information that will 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. Inspire your customer to upgrade her return or exchange by enthusiastically recommending products that will better meet her needs. Your customer may object to this and state that 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 her. You'll be surprised how many customers will agree to look at what you're recommending. It often just takes a bit of finesse because the customer came in with the mindset of getting a refund.

I can't stress enough that **how** you present the refund alternative impacts the results. When you do this with confidence, passion, and a smile you'll often get the results you want. We owe it to our customers- and ourselves - to try and overcome at least one refund objection. This can save a retailer thousands of dollars in returns.

If, after you've taken these steps, the customer wants to move forward with a return then of course you'll escort him to the counter and get his return handled cheerfully and efficiently.

So let me ask, are you ready for The Season of Me? All it takes is the right mindset and Three "I"s with a Smile.

- Doug Fleener

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Three I's and a Smile

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