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On Dasher, on Dancer, on Master and Visa! Planning for holiday success in 2019

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Here we are — in the throes of summer heat — planning our winter wonderlands for the upcoming holiday season! Some may say that we've been hitting the eggnog a little early, but we all know the importance of the Christmas season and the impact that well-planned merchandising can have on the success of the holiday, as a whole. Indeed, the face of Christmas selling continues to evolve, with the most significant changes occurring in the past ten years.



Black Friday and Cyber Monday have compelled us to be “first out” with the holiday, despite the perishability of the products we sell. Our industry now competes with the efficiency of online “clicks,” which offer 24/7 availability of floral products and other gifting items. Giants such as Amazon, Alibaba, and Apple have dominated the e-commerce

markets, and other dominating “brick” retailers have added an equally successful “click” program that has eclipsed the old way of consumer purchasing.

In addition, free and low-cost delivery options have closed the gap of convenience for the modern consumer. Now more than ever, the importance of in-store merchandising has become the conjoining force between customer engagement and the optimization of our sales and profit goals.

Here are the Top Five Merchandising Must-Haves:

Step 1: The Business Plan For every holiday, including Christmas, creating a solid business plan is paramount. The business plan contains each strategic component of the holiday and ensures that all teams are working toward a common goal without backpedaling mid-stream. Once complete, (optimally five to six months in advance of the holiday), the business plan should be distributed upstream and downstream to all who are involved in its execution.

Here are the components of a strong holiday business plan:

- **Title Page:** Name of the holiday(s), dates referenced in the plan, index and name of the plan’s author(s)
- **Executive Summary:** Overview of the holiday season, and how the proposed plan will engage customers and build revenue
- **Financial Overview:** Year-to-date financials, store segmentation, labor needs, sales and profit goals of the holiday and anticipated risks in achieving this goal.
- **Key Category Strategy:** Advertised products, including retails, anticipated gross revenue and target gross margins. • **Supporting Products:** Non-advertised and new product introductions, including retails, anticipated gross revenue and target gross margins.
- **Merchandising Plan:** Store plan-o-grams and general store merchandising standards
- **Marketing Plan:** Required ad space and sign packets, and a social media calendar • **Distribution Plan:** Anticipated inbound/outbound warehouse volume, with ship dates and required inspection reports
- **Competitive Analysis:** Differentiation points of your company from all other competitors, including brick-and-mortar competition, e-commerce and other gifting companies. What will make your company better than any other?
- **Operational Staffing:** Store schedules, holiday coverage, timelines and reporting requirements from field teams. Also include corporate contact information and after-hours emergency phone numbers in this section.
- **Conclusion:** Overview of the top ten requirements of a successful holiday

Step 2: The Post-Thanksgiving Transition Without doubt, the most important financial win of the holiday season is a smooth and transparent product transition out of Thanksgiving and into Christmas. Virtually overnight, store teams transition from Thanksgiving colors to Christmas colors. It’s important to create a specific post-Thanksgiving transition plan for store teams, teaching them

how to convert in-date Thanksgiving products into Christmas products.

Although the traditional colors of Christmas are pine green, snow white and apple red, there are many transitional colors that can be easily converted from Thanksgiving to Christmas, as well: Ivory, Gold, Peach, Purple, Green, Burgundy and all metallics. In these cases, a quick tutorial on how to wisely convert these colors into Christmas-ready products will dramatically reduce unnecessary throw-aways the week after Thanksgiving.

Step 3: The Senses Remember... customers shop with five senses, not one. Many times, a merchandising plan focuses solely on the visual aspect and completely disregards the other four senses. As we discussed at the beginning, retail has dramatically changed and the best way for us to compete with online, non-floral gifting options is to ramp up our merchandising elements to engage all five of these senses:

1. Sight: All visual cues including color, shape, harmony, lighting, proportion, contrast, freshness and space
2. Sound: All audible sounds within the store including music. As a rule of thumb, mellow music encourages longer browsing, while more trendy music attracts a younger demographic.
3. Touch: All tactile experiences within the shopping environment including pots, baskets, fabrics, bows, upgrades and even the plants and flowers, themselves! Also, remember that the weight of the product equates to "monetary value" in the consumers' eyes.
4. Smell: All fragrances within the environment such as cinnamon, vanilla, berries and of course, evergreen. The sense of smell is a "fast track" to the part of the brain that controls emotion and memory. Consequently, fragrance is an extremely important component of durable brand identity.
5. Taste: The holidays are all about taste and a supermarket environment makes it easy! However, there are many ways to bring taste into the floral shoppe by offering happy-hour sweet bites, or by offering a free chocolate or mini candy cane with every floral purchase.

Step 4: The Themes The primary theme, in this case, would be Christmas, but within the department at-large there should be secondary themes (called, "vignettes") which offer products for other events and occasions that occur during the Christmas timeframe. Here are some examples of December display vignettes:

- Primary Display(s): Christmas products such as poinsettias, pines, zygo cactus, etc.
- Vignette #1: Winter
- Vignette #2: Hanukkah
- Vignette #3: Kwanzaa
- Vignette #4: New Year
- Vignette #5: Everyday Occasions such as Anniversary, Birthday, Get Well, Baby, etc.
- Bouquet Fixture: A mixture of Christmas, General Winter, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, New Year and

Everyday Occasions based on demographics.

- **Consumer Bunches:** A strong assortment of colors, with 50 percent of the display containing holiday-specific colors.
- **Accessories:** Pots, pics, wraps, balloons, and signs should be used to communicate the theme on each display, and to also bolster sales and margin. Be creative with each vignette and refresh them daily with fresh product and proper maintenance. Undeniably, they represent every penny of a department's sales and profits!

Step 5: The Display Elements Although the theme and contents of each display should be different, there are basic techniques of great displaymanship that are common to each display. These techniques will draw customers into the floral shoppe, and most importantly, keep them there long enough to buy! These important display techniques are:

- **Elements of Design:** Line, Shape, Form, Size, Space, Color, Value and Texture
- **Principles of Design:** Novelty, Variety, Harmony, Unity, Balance, Proportion, Emphasis, Contrast, Rhythm, and Pattern.
- **Focal Product:** The focal product within each vignette is displayed at the highest, center-point of the display and represents three different styles of the same product. For example, in the winter vignette, pine trees may be the selected focal product. This means that there should be a set of three pine trees at the highest point of the display upgraded with three different styles of décor. The principle behind this "rule of three" is that a human's normal eye movement wants to move from side to side, and the "rule of three" technique is used to keep a customer's eye on the display long enough to be enticed by its beauty. If there is no center-point of three items at the forefront of the display, the customer's eye will not be affixed to the display long enough to capture their interest, and they will walk quickly past it after a quick glance. Another term for this technique is "dynamic clustering" and almost every well-merchandised store follows this rule.
- **Volume:** Full displays sell product; Empty displays are lonely and dull. Studies show that the fewer the products on display, the less likely a customer will make a purchase from it. Imagine how unattractive a banana display would be with only three bunches of bananas on display. Volume sells!
- **Sensory Component:** Signs and other graphic material within the display communicate product specifics to the consumer such as the theme, product name, size/stem count and price. It's extremely important that all signs are readable from a distance and create a barrier-free experience toward the final execution of the purchase. A general rule of thumb for indoor signage is that the text should be 1-inch tall for every 32 feet away that the sign needs to be read.

Outside signs for products such as Christmas trees should have a minimum text size of five inches tall so that this signage can be easily read from a moving car. Make no mistake, the appearance and layout of each floral shoppe is just as important as the products for sale.

The sensory, theme and display elements are all essential to a customers' experience, and they can spell the difference between customers who make multiple gift purchases and those who leave empty-handed. With the proliferation of online, non-floral gift options and in-store purchases where 70 percent are unplanned, it is imperative to provide simple and clear merchandising guidelines to store teams.

Make it fun! Sponsor a display contest where employees can post their work online through the company portal. Then, post the best of those store photographs on social media to show customers what beauty awaits them in their local marketplace! Get ready to Deck the Halls in 2019! On Dasher, On Dancer, On Master and Visa!

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