

Prize pattern



Sarah Enzminger of Emmett, Idaho, admires the quilt she won in a drawing held last month by the Treasure Valley Quiltmakers. The quilt, called “Mill Girls,” was started by a quilter in Vale and finished by the Ontario-based Quiltmakers group.

Happy Holidays

from Sarah's Foster Care

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BUSINESS BEAT

Be merry, and other seasonal business tips

By Andrea Testi
For the Enterprise

The Christmas business tradition, which goes back at least 200 years, accounts for over \$1.3 trillion or 25% of U.S. annual retail income, according to the National Retail Association.

As a business owner you should be enjoying and deriving benefit from this time of year. Like Santa, you have spent time getting to know your customers and learn what they want for Christmas.

Now is your time to go the extra mile to see that their wishes are met by delivering excellent customer service, and memorable products and experiences.

Put your customers first. Focus your attention by listening, making eye contact, and showing them you are paying attention. Take the time to understand each person's personal situation and wishes.

Inspect your business from your customer's perspective and balance your customer service by putting yourself in their shoes.

Keep your customers happy. Make them feel valued and appreciated. Santa keeps his place in our hearts because he always lives up to what he promises – as a business owner if you promise to do something, make sure you do it.

Be nostalgic. Make an emotional connection with your customers as so much of what makes the season special is wrapped in our sentimental memories. Help customers associate fond holiday memories with your store all year long.

Use emotive marketing, via songs, colors, and smells; all of which come together to stimulate feelings of family, community, togetherness and joy. Santa uses nostalgia through the pleasant memories of the past.

Train your staff. Amazing customer service is important at all times but especially during the holiday season. You need to make sure your employees are on the top of their game. They need to be energized about their role in the business. Like Santa, they need to love what they do!

Technology Checkup. Make sure your website front pages are continually refreshed - promoting holiday products and emphasizing timely purchasing and weekly sales.

Ensure your shopping cart is working; optimized for mobile device viewing and purchasing. Market to mobile devices – offering weekly text alerts and loyalty programs.

Santa has traditionally delivered gifts with his carriage, but these days he is in the cloud as well; reaching us through the internet as a shopping platform and to help him deliver his presents.

Demonstrate your sense of community. Partner with local businesses to co-market products and services. Have a good knowledge of each other's inventory and make referrals for local shopping experiences. Consider clever ways to partner with local charitable organizations. Keep local dollars local. The logistics of working with your community depend on effective collaboration. Just like Santa, success occurs when all team members work with pinpoint timing and accuracy toward fulfilling a shared goal.

Be Merry. Don't pass up the opportunity to build relationships while enjoying the spirit of the season. Plan to attend social and community gatherings,

engage your workforce in charitable endeavors, host a party or special shopping night, and celebrate the magic of the season. Santa's enthusiasm is infectious and the reason why he has built such a loyal following - make sure to throw in a few ho, ho, ho's!

Be unique. Even if your core product is mainstream, you can highlight the unique aspects of your merchandise, giving your customers the chance to find something new and delightful in your store. Invite your customers to feel and try your products before buying them. Touch is a real sensation you can offer your customers, something they cannot find online.

Give your products added visual appeal by adding bold color. Attractively pre-wrapped gifts can make great props, help set the holiday mood, and serve as handy quick sale items for customers in a rush. Remember - Santa hasn't gotten to where he is today by simply using the same tricks every year. He knows that tastes change and that moving with the times is key to keeping his customers happy .

It's all part of continuous innovation that has made Santa such an enduring part of the Christmas season. You too can capitalize on this festive time of year, enjoy your business, provide your customers with an exceptional shopping experience, and give back to your community.

Andrea Testi, director of the Treasure Valley Community College Small Business Development Center, can be reached at SBDC@tvcc.cc.

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