

Maximizing Your Christmas Sales

Christmas is the make or break season for the majority of retailers. As such, it is critical that we capitalize on the increased traffic in our stores. This article will explore a few key strategies you can use to boost your sales during these hectic few weeks.

First of all, invest a few moments of your time learning what your customer needs and wants. Instead of waiting for them to approach you with a question, take the initiative and ask them a few questions. Use open-ended questions like;

“What can I help you find?”

“What brings you into the store today?”

“What specifically are you looking for?”

When they tell you what type of product interests them ask a few additional questions to gain a better understanding of their specific needs.

“What are you looking for in a ...?”

“Who is this item for?”

“What features interest you?”

“Why are those features important?”

“Tell me how you plan to use this item.”

These questions will help you narrow down their search for a specific product and will speed up the sales process. Plus, you will begin to differentiate yourself from most of your competitors and give people a reason to buy from you.

I have conducted hundreds of sales training workshops and this concept seems to be one of the most difficult for people to grasp. They inherently know that asking questions is important but they seldom develop the discipline and patience to ask quality questions. I recommend that you work with your team and develop a list of questions that are relevant to your particular store. Have your sales associates focus on asking these questions and you will quickly notice a difference in the way your customers respond to you.

Once the customer has selected, or shows interest in, a particular item, you should ask them for the sale. Yet most retail sales associates do not ask the customer to make a buying decision because they are concerned of coming across as pushy or aggressive. There are, however, several ways of asking for the sale in a non-threatening manner.

“Would you like me to bring this to the counter for you?”

“Does that one appeal to you?”

“Would you like to take this one?”

“Can I wrap that up for you?”

Learning to ask for the sale is a challenging step for most retailers. Teaching your team to become comfortable with this one action will do more to increase your sales than almost anything else.

Overcoming objections is also an important skill for your team to learn. Invest a few minutes to list the most common objections you and your team hear. Then, brainstorm ideas to effectively resolve these objections. Here is a four-step method that will help you;

1. Empathize. This means that you verbally express your understanding of the customer's perspective or point-of-view.
2. Clarify. Clarifying the objection means you restate the objection back to the customer in your own words to ensure that you have understood exactly what they mean.
3. The third step is to seek permission. This means you ask permission to offer a solution.
4. The fourth step is to offer a solution that is relevant to your customers' specific situation.

Invest time developing and practicing responses so your team becomes more proficient with this aspect of the sales process.

People also make buying decisions based on their overall experience in your store or place of business. Here are just three influencing factors:

- i) Ease of business. Are you easy to do business with or do I, as a customer, have to jump through hoops to return something? Are you well staffed or do you reduce your costs by scheduling a skeleton staff at any given time? Most customers understand that there will be line ups at Christmas and are willing to wait a bit longer to be served. However, that is no excuse to trim your schedule in order to reduce your labour costs. This will affect person's decision to do business with you now as well as in the future.
- ii) Staff accessibility and attitude. Is your team friendly and well trained in customer services procedures? Do they exhibit the mentality that the customer is important and comes first or do they spend their time gossiping and gabbing? Do they eagerly approach the customer or do they wait for customers to come up to them first. I recently bought an aquarium and although the staff was knowledgeable they made me feel like I was intruding on their time.
- iii) Product selection and availability. Do you have a good supply chain management or order fulfillment process in place. Prior to buying my aquarium I placed my order at one store. Unfortunately, no one ever contacted me to tell me my tank had arrived. A similar situation happened when I placed an order for sunglasses at another retailer.

Here is the final strategy. Sell more add-on items. In most retail environments accessorizing is a missed opportunity that greatly reduces our potential to earn an excellent income. Far too often we're so focused on the primary sale that we neglect the opportunities to increase our sales and our profitability. But no sale is complete unless customers have been given every chance to accessorize their purchases. Whatever you sell, you can always suggest add-ons. From my perspective, the organization which best achieves this is McDonalds Restaurants. Regardless of what you order the counter person seldom fails to ask you if you'd like something else, dessert, a salad, soda etc. And these are teenagers!!! If these minimum wage order-takers can learn how to accessorize (aka. suggestively sell) it should be a piece of cake for you.

Regardless of the type of product or service you sell, there are opportunities to increase your sales by suggesting add on items. There's virtually no limit to the possibilities. All it takes is a bit of initiative, creativity and an understanding that you are actually helping the customer improve their overall purchase.

Many salespeople make the mistake of assuming that the customer will ask for specific accessories. This is not always the case. When my wife and I bought our first computer we could hardly wait to get home, set it up and become a high-tech couple. I unpacked the boxes and began plugging everything in. Unfortunately, I ran out of receptacles before I completed the setup. I didn't have an extra power bar handy so that meant I had to get back in my car, drive to a store, wait in line, and return home before I could enjoy my new toy. A good power bar in a computer store can cost up to \$100 yet I choose to go the closest store where I picked a very inexpensive one for around \$12. Would I have paid more at the computer store? Willingly, providing the sales person had done his job properly.

Another concern about accessorizing is that some salespeople feel they'll come across as being pushy if they keep suggesting more accessories. The reality is that the customer will tell you when they reach their limit. Several years ago I was in the process of buying two new suits. The two salespeople who assisted me (the store was pretty quiet) kept suggesting ties, shirts, socks, and belts. I accepted some suggestions, rejected others, until I felt I had enough variety and selection. The end result was an additional \$300 in revenue for the store. My original budget was shot to heck but at no time did I feel pressured or coerced into making a purchase. I had the right and ability to say no at any time. If the salespeople hadn't suggested the accessories I may have bought one or two ties, but certainly not the three or four I ended up with along with the shirts and several pairs of socks. Ultimately, when I left the store I felt great because I knew that I had several options every time I planned to wear one of those suits.

Accessorizing is part of the sales process and must be done accordingly. Rather than wait until the end of the sale to begin mentioning add-on items incorporate them into your sales presentation. If you wait until you are standing at the point of sale and ringing up the customer's purchase to sell add-ons your potential to increase the sale is dramatically reduced. The reason is simple. As they walk to the sales counter they mentally tally up their purchase. By the time they reach the counter they know

approximately how much money they will have to part with and they close the mental bank. To re-open that door will take a great deal of effort and energy. Therefore, it is critical that you sell accessories and add-ons **during** the sales process rather than at the end.

Share the ideas in this article with your team. Discuss the best ways to implement them in your business. And take action to make it happen. Your bottom line will thank you.

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Kelley Robertson is a professional speaker and trainer and helps businesses increase their sales and motivate their employees. He is also the author of "Stop, Ask & Listen – Proven sales techniques to turn browsers into buyers." This unique sales guide has been written specifically for retailers and offers practical, easy-to-use advice to increase sales and customer loyalty. Receive a FREE copy of "100 Ways to Increase Your Sales" by subscribing to his 59-Second Tip, a free weekly e-zine available at www.RobertsonTrainingGroup.com. Contact Kelley at 1-866-694-3583 or Kelley@RobertsonTrainingGroup.com.