



You can increase your receipts with some simple low-cost solutions.

10 Surefire Ways to Boost Sales

Everyone's looking for more register rings during this sluggish recovery. Here are some inexpensive and easy tips to help you get them. By Laurel Tielis

Some retailers seem to get it instinctively—how to get the word out and bring in more business. Others, who have seen their profits tank along with the economy, clearly need more help. Here are some innovative and still easy-to-implement strategies to help you connect with customers—and improve profits.

1. Put out penny candy. People feel better when they have a little treat, so give them one. Tootsie Rolls, Mary Janes, string licorice, Swedish fish, and Bit-o-Honey are satisfying and relatively sinless. Buy them in bulk so they won't cost you too much, and let customers dig in.

2. Serve a hot beverage like coffee,

tea or cocoa. People don't gulp these; they drink them slowly.

I worked with a young woman who imported gifts from Jamaica. She opened a teeny store on a great street in Greenwich Village. It was basically a counter, with minimal room to walk past it. Because it was so narrow, customers would walk in, feel trapped, and walk out again without looking at the merchandise.

The solution was to institute a coffee hour. The wonderful aroma of Blue Mountain coffee, native to Jamaica, lured people in and got them to stick around, look around and shop. She even got the coffee company to donate the product.

You can do the same. Even quality coffee is not overly expensive, so get the best. Or see if your local coffee house wants to partner with you; they provide the coffee and you give out discount coupons for purchases in their shop. This is a great way of getting to "everyone wins."

3. Serve wine. I'm not a big advocate of spirits, but I am an advocate of taking care of your market, and there are occasions when this makes sense. If you're entertaining in-store or having a special event, serve wine. First, it's festive and second, people take their time when drinking it. That's good for you, because it gives you time to get to know them, and it gives them time to look around and find something they want to buy.

4. Send out birthday greetings for your customers' birthdays. Large stores like Loehmann's and DSW note customers' birthdays by sending discount coupons good for a week or even the entire month of the birth date. You can do it in a more personal way by sending a real birthday card and offering anything from a gift coupon to an invitation to the store and a cupcake saying "Happy Birthday."

5. Send out birthday greetings for your birthday. "It's my birthday," you could write, "but you get the present." Offer something special to everyone who comes in to celebrate with you. This serves two functions: It brings customers into your store, and it also makes you more real. It's another way for you to become more of a friend and less of a salesperson. You might want to give away good-looking, reusable shopping bags or tote bags. It's a good way to get your name out and green your business.

6. Twofers work in the theater—try them in your store. Invite your best customers to bring in a friend, and when they do, both get a special prize or small gift. This gives you an opportunity to build your customer base and to increase your ties with your regulars.

7. Roll back prices. Make your store more appealing by emphasizing its pedigree. You can choose one or two items or do it storewide. Not only do people

tip

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enjoy paying less in an intimidating economy, nostalgia is especially appealing—remembering a time when things were warmer and fuzzier.

8. Offer a discount grab bag to increase excitement. Shoppers reach in and pick out their own discount percentage. It's more fun for them and cheaper for you. While the majority of slips will offer 10 percent, 15 percent, and 20 percent off, there's always the

possibility of getting that 50 percent or 75 percent off ticket. When someone does, make a fuss over it. Take a picture, put it up on your wall, write about it in your newsletter, put it online on your website, tweet to your followers, and in general, talk it up.

9. Attract interest with freebies. You know how much you like something for nothing. Your shoppers do as well. Put the word out the way radio stations do; you can say the first person to call, send an e-mail, or write about the store on Facebook will receive a gift. Zazu gift store owners Steven and Caroline Haddad offer free items on their blog. Not only does it attract customer interest, it's brought them a lot of media attention, including mention in the Wall Street Journal.

Involve your vendors in this. You'll increase your ties to them, and in most cases, they'll be willing to supply the

product since they're getting buzz.

10. Generate rewards through a frequent buyer plan. Cole Hardware's frequent shoppers' club gives members 15 percent off what they're buying when they sign up, as well as a check each year for 5 percent of their total purchases. They also offer Recession Buster days—students, teachers and seniors over 65 get 20 percent off once a week. The store captures customers' information and captures their business for a small percentage off. ■

Laurel Tielis is a speaker, author and confirmed shopper based in the San Francisco Bay area. You can read her blog at laureltielis.wordpress.com or follow her on Twitter @laureltielis. This article is excerpted from her book, "Ka-Ching! How to Ring Up More Sales" ©2009, available at Amazon (www.amazon.com/Ka-Ching-How-Ring-More-Sales/dp/0977728579).

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