

Preparing for Black Friday...

It's the most...wonderful...time of the year, IF you're prepared for it. Typically, the day after Thanksgiving has a distinct retail connotation to it, but the day before Thanksgiving is HUGE for restaurants (who wants to cook the night before turkey day?), and during Thanksgiving families have a tendency to discuss all the wonderful services they need (banking, insurance, investments, real estate). Black Friday is for more than just retailers. Are you prepared? Here are six focal points to remember this Black Friday (November 27).



1. The day BEFORE Thanksgiving is one of the busiest restaurant days of the year-

If you are going to put the effort into a Thanksgiving Day meal, you might not want to put the effort into a meal the night before. Those restaurants that offer "take out" or delivery can be VERY busy right before Thanksgiving IF they market themselves properly. If you haven't planned your pre-Thanksgiving marketing blitz yet, do so NOW. You don't want to concede one of the busiest days of the year for your type of business, do you? And, if you are a retailer or service business, is there a way you can work with local restaurants to include YOUR information in THEIR delivery? Let's work together...

2. Don't concede the day!!! The following is a synopsis of a Black Friday discussion I had with a retailer prior to becoming the Main Street Director. Merchant- "We don't do anything for the day after Thanksgiving because everyone goes out of town." Me- "Maybe everyone is going out of town because not enough businesses are actively targeting customers to get them to stay." Merchant- "Why would I do anything if everyone is leaving?" Thus the vicious circle continues... Marketing doesn't create customers, but a solid marketing campaign kicks into its highest gear when people are looking to spend money. The day after Thanksgiving is the second highest grossing retail sales day of the year (*the day after Christmas is number one*). At the minimum, target your customers. Give them something special to do at your business and do it EARLY (before they have a chance to leave) in the day.

3. Services need to get into the act, too- Thanksgiving and Christmas are two major family holidays. In today's market, that's important because families are more spread out than ever. So, when families DO get together, they often go beyond the standard celebration and make FAMILY decisions. Investments, banking, legal documents, insurance, housing arrangements, medical issues and more are discussed while all the family is in one place. Getting information about your service business in the hands of family members PRIOR to the holiday (*that includes information and scenarios that fit the context of family discussions*) is VITAL. If your business is on someone's mind when they are making a family decision, there is a good chance that you will pick up the business.

4. Make it fun for everyone- Too often, businesses view a holiday shopping event as something to "get through". But remember, people rarely get all of their shopping done on one day, and people are known to stop back by a business a few times on the day after Thanksgiving IF stores make the experience fun for everyone. That means- have a small give away for the kids (*if kids aren't happy, parent's can't shop*), or have some sort of activity that kids can participate in. Have seating areas with reading material (*dad's get cranky after store number 2*). Have a script that recommends merchandise (*I don't know what to get them... Have you heard that line before?*) Go over a list of items in all sections of the store with your employees NOW. Repetition breeds retention for products and policies. Joke around, have Santa stop by at random times throughout the day. Have drawings. Order food in for your staff. If it's a party, people want to participate (*and shop*). If the day after Thanksgiving is something you dread, who wants to shop where people aren't having a good time?

5. Make it convenient- Gift wrapping, shipping, home delivery, layaway and other services encourage more shopping. Have shopping baskets available, or, at the very least train your staff to keep the customers hands free (*full arms = the end of shopping*). Here's one of my favorites, a customer buys items and then says they don't want to drag everything to the car right now... Offer to keep the items there for the customer until they have a chance to stop back by (*they have to come into your business again, and generally shop again*). Gift wrapping keeps people looking around (*let me wrap that up for you while you look around*). Shipping can make all the difference to a person that flew in (*I can't take that on the plane with me...*) Home delivery adds a personal touch (*what time will you be home tonight; I'll just swing it by*). Layaway encourages money down on an impulse buy. Differentiate yourself with service, train your employees to extend services and watch your sales grow. Making things easy saves people time and money. Because Main Street businesses generally have a higher degree of flexibility, use what you've got to set yourself apart!

6. Keep them coming back- OK, you had your event, people had a blast, your one day sales were awesome... Now what? Those drawings that you held, can you collect their information to send out coupons, gift cards or e-mail notifications? The one day event should be designed to encourage repetitive shopping. Don't view activities as independent. One thing should lead to another and another... How do you plan to capitalize on your holiday success?-- And, as a side note, keeping people coming back to your store means BEING OPEN when they can come back to your store. Start your extended holiday hours the day after Thanksgiving, post them, and give your customers information indicating your extended hours *for their shopping convenience...*

The vast majority of our Main Street members are smaller businesses, and their strength lies in their adaptability. Your ideas, creativity and motivation are a tremendous asset IF you can take your plans and make them a reality. Make a short list of some things you would like to do to improve your business, and then get them done! Play to your strengths, and realize that you have an organization in Emporia Main Street willing to help your business succeed.

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