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BEST HOLIDAY ADVICE

“Try to relax because a monkey with a hat on can sell at Christmastime.”
— *Emily & Matthew Clark, Spath Jewelers, Bartow, FL*

STEPS TO LAST-MINUTE HOLIDAY SUCCESS

STORY BY **Eileen McClelland**

**BUT FIRST, TAKE A DEEP BREATH
AND GRAB AN ELF HAT.**





When the holidays roll around, Niki Novello dons her elf hat and her biggest smile and yells, “Ho, ho, ho,” when a customer walks in. Visitors to Cleveland Jewelry Designs, her small family store in Lyndhurst, OH, enjoy her cheerful demeanor so much that they often give her tips or pay more than required for simple repairs, which are often complimentary for regular customers.

She and her dad, owner Alan Novello, who wears a Santa hat, usually donate these tips to a charitable cause or use them to buy a pizza when they work late.

Cathy McMurray, owner of The Hunt House in Huntsville, Ontario, Canada, disarms shoppers with a big bowl of chocolates. “Most are delighted, but some are scared and ask us why we are offering them a chocolate when they didn’t buy anything yet,” she says. “We laugh and tell them they can still have a chocolate.”

Consultant Andrea Hill says it’s natural to feel stressed during a season that for many in the jewelry business is crucial. But when owners and staff are stressed, customers can feel it, too. “If your store is a calm oasis of happy campers tending to the needs of customers, you’ll have much greater success.”

Be clear about what you’re trying to achieve as a team, be motivating, offer praise every time you see praiseworthy behaviors, be available to step in and help, and be a calming, emotionally mature presence in the store. And if this isn’t you, then find a manager who is these things and step out of the way.

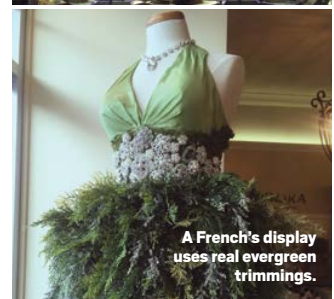
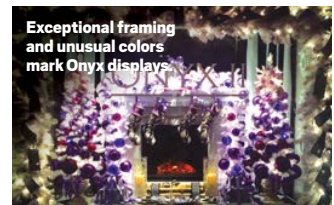
Once everyone seems calm, grab your elf hat, smile and take these sensible steps to a successful selling season.



CREATE USEFUL DISPLAYS

The fabulous high-concept windows at Onyx II Fine Jewelers in Watertown, CT, helped the shop win Cool Store acclaim in 2016. The secret to creating compelling windows is to include elements that draw attention to your jewelry in ways that a showcase can’t. Brand manager James Michael Murphy notes that while jewelry is beautiful, it’s far too small and detailed to attract people passing by in their cars. For 2015, the Onyx II “Yuletide Treasures”-themed window featured an electric fireplace, complete with an exterior speaker playing a crackling fire sound, plus beautiful trees in the shop’s theme colors and stockings overflowing with Onyx gift-wrapped goodies.

Laurelle Giesbrecht of French’s Jewellery in Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada, has always had an eye for display, and at the end of every day, she pauses to examine how the store looks. While



display comes naturally to her, she knows that’s not always true of her staff. So when she sees an area of her store that needs attention, she takes a “before” picture, spruces up the problem area, and then takes an “after” picture. She displays the photos on a board for her staff titled “This is how we do this.” Says Giesbrecht: “It’s worth a thousand words.”



Alan Novello (left), sales associate Rita Rice (middle), and Niki Novello (right) don Santa garb during the holidays.



MAKE WORK FUN

2

Offer staff incentives for the highest average retail sale or the most add-ons, says Darci

Aslage, business mentor for the Edge Retail Academy. “We created a bingo game, and if they complete the bingo squares, they win a prize,” she says.

Or put gift cards or cash in a lot of different envelopes, and when you catch an employee doing something right, let them pick an envelope out of a Santa bag and win a prize — a \$10 gift card to a local business or \$50 in cash.

Britten Wolf, owner of BVW Jewelers in Reno, NV, says he takes in so many unusual repair items during the holidays — everything from candle holders and ornaments to shoes — that he offers the staff member who predicts the year’s oddest repair item a gift from Santa.



Michelle, Jasmine and Britten Wolf of BVW Jewelers offer unique sales incentives during the holidays.

MOVE OUT OLD INVENTORY

3

French’s Jewellery’s Giesbrecht clears out old merchandise by early November. It’s her

only deep-discount sale of the year. She puts aside classics and basics she knows will sell for the holidays and deeply discounts everything else. “We’re closed the day before and the night after. We work through the night so when we open up the morning after, our store is Christmas-fied.”

Andrea Hill says the fourth quarter is a great time to create sales inventory highlights. “Picture this: You take two or three items that have been sitting there forever, and you dramatically mark them down. Feature them in a tower near the door, so nobody can miss it. Make it clear that when these deals are

gone, they’re gone — but also, that there will be some new surprise in that same spot tomorrow, or the next day. The goal is two-fold: Move old inventory, and catch the attention of the browser who would otherwise walk in and walk out without purchasing anything.”

TAKE A CRASH COURSE IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

4

Investing a couple of hours in truly understanding how social media advertising works could

save you time and money.

Morgan Nicki Saatchi of SVS Fine Jewelry in Oceanside, NY, admits that Facebook advertising was “Greek to her” until she spent a couple of weeks listening to experts presenting webinars on the topic. Now, Facebook has replaced traditional media as the company’s advertising of choice.

“We target ads to an age demographic who have an interest in the particular product or event,” Saatchi says. The store has about 20,000 followers, and online sales are up to 15 percent of total sales. Online purchase price points are generally less than \$1,000.

Using bitly (bitly.com) has helped Saatchi track online sales that come via Facebook ads. The website provides detailed analytics that show where the traffic and the purchase came from.



SHOW THEM SOMETHING SPECIAL

5

At Tiny Jewel Box in Washington, DC, the company tagline is, "If it's not special, it's not here." For the holidays this year, a collection of three Michael Galmer evening purses in silver, lined in 24K gold with silver mesh, will be on display. Each is numbered, hallmarked and priced at \$6,500. The collection not only fits the company's philosophy, but is attracting attention from local media. One newsworthy hook: The first purse has been acquired by the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian National Design Museum to showcase the art of repoussé silver crafting. Says Tiny Jewel Box president Matthew Rosenheim: "These handcrafted, numbered purses will appeal to a woman

who insists on rare pieces she won't see worn by every other woman."

Mary Jo Chanski of Hannoush Jewelers in Rutland, VT, always orders special inventory on memo for the fourth quarter. "Each year we get some crazy sexy cool last minute pieces for the last few days before Christmas," she says. "They are extremely unique, extremely beautiful and extremely expensive. But you never know who's going to walk in and say 'YES! This year I am buying my wife a diamond tiara!'"

On the other end of the price-point spectrum, Niki Novello of Cleveland Jewelry Design showed and sold dozens of Alpaca wool scarves with embroidered initials last year for about \$20 as add-on purchases. "A \$20 gift that is personalized is very hard to come by, and embroidered scarves are elegant and classy. People buy them for gift exchanges at their businesses."



Unusual purses by Michael Galmer will star for Tiny Jewel Box.



6 THANK YOUR BEST CUSTOMERS

Michael Buley of Jewelry Ads That Work says if you haven't been advertising consistently throughout the year, diving into new ad channels in November won't work. At most, double your ad buy and concentrate instead on thanking your loyal customers.

"The first dollars jewelers should spend at Christmas is to allocate a decent amount of money to thank customers who put bread on their table," he says.

Identify your top five, 50 or 100 customers and find gifts to send to them — a bouquet, coffee gift cards, a bottle of Jack Daniels, cookies, golf balls. Ask yourself: what can we do to make this person feel really cool? "Spending \$5,000 to thank your top customers is better than spending \$5,000 on fliers," Buley says.

Or give your best customers a no-strings-attached gift certificate for \$100. "If customers come in with their \$100 certificate and they find something for \$100 bucks, fine. You've thanked them. But a lot of people end up spending a lot of money." If they spend \$25,000 a year with you, do something really special. After all, asks Buley, "Wouldn't you pay \$400 a year to have these people come back and spend \$25,000 again?"



BE MEMORABLE

The Hunt House's McMurray decorates the store Christmas tree with scrolls that contain discounts. Beginning Dec. 1, when customers make purchases, they take a scroll from the tree to learn what percentage of discount they'll receive on the item they have already selected. "They can't go back and get more stuff," McMurray says, once they learn their discount. One scroll offers a 100 percent discount, but the range is generally 5 to 40 percent. "People have tried to dig into the tree," she says. "They figure we've hidden the 100 percent one deep." The promotion is advertised on the radio and in the newspaper,

but word of mouth often leads to more sales, too.

Albert Yocum of Yocum Jewelry in Marceline, MO, kicks off his holiday season during a popular town event called Peanut Night. All the participating merchants put coupons or prizes in bags and

the Chamber sells the bags for \$1 each. They usually sell more than 2,500 bags in half an hour.

Last year, Harris Jewelers in Troy, OH, ran a wish-list contest with a prize of a \$1,000 shopping spree. The store also celebrated its 70th anniversary by offering a \$70 gift card with every \$250 holiday purchase through Christmas Eve.



Albert Yocum greets a future client and poses with Santa during Peanut Night.

BREAK OUT OF THE EVENT RUT

8 Mixing up your event music can go a long way to adding some spark. "Classical music is fine day to day, but for parties, it's not going to entice you to go shopping," says Jen Cullen Williams of Luxury Brand Group. "Go to any store targeted toward millennials and it's going to have music that moves. It's got to have some energy to it."

For another spin on a traditional idea, turn your ladies night into wish-list event into a couples party. It can be more fun and sometimes lead to big sales right on the spot, says Karen Hollis of K Hollis Jewelers in Batavia, IL. "It helps guys get ideas and makes them want to shop early to make sure that the item will still be here," she says. Hollis invites her top 100 customers and has hosted as many as 30 couples at a time.

ALERT THE MEDIA

9 If you're planning a cool event, like a choir singing in your store or a sommelier bringing specialty wines for a tasting, don't forget to contact local media, says Williams. And that invitation should include local bloggers, even if they don't specialize in jewelry or fashion. Lifestyle or "mommy" bloggers have influence in the community, too. Invite publishers of local newspapers and magazines who might bring along an editor. Consider partnering with a magazine that would be willing to provide you with a photographer as an added value for your advertising business. Call local media and offer to provide expert tips on the anticipated holiday hot sellers.

12 UNUSUAL HOLIDAY COPING STRATEGIES



1 I dance wildly to the radio in my back office. — *Kate Pearce, Pearce Jewelers, West Lebanon, NH*

2 I spray orange-scented essential oil around my store to heighten the good vibes. — *Janne Etz, Contemporary Concepts, Cocoa, FL*

3 Play as much Huey Lewis and the News on the store stereo system as possible. — *Matthew and Emily Clark, Spath Jewelers, Bartow, FL*

4 I've made a fair amount of jewelry while drinking tequila. — *Daniel Spier, Daniel R. Spier Jewelers, Cambridge, MA*

5 I dress up as Santa Kas. I have a lady Santa outfit. It's pretty; not a Mrs. Claus outfit. — *Kas Jacquot, Kas A Designs, Jefferson City, MO*

6 Inhale rosemary essential oil for focus. — *Julie Terwilliger, Wexford Jewelers, Cadillac, MI*

7 I wear a bow tie every Christmas Eve while working the sales floor. I never wear bow ties, so it throws people off. — *Marc Majors, Sam L. Majors, Midland, TX*

8 I go out the back door and talk to myself, if just for a few minutes. Sometimes even the boss needs a pep talk or a scolding! — *Rosanne Kroen, Rosanne's Diamonds and Gold, South Bend, IN*

9 I always have an adjustable set of dumbbell weights in my office. During times of stress or just to get my mind right, I will rep out a few sets. It tends to be a major stress reliever for me. It's similar to positive reinforcement. — *Howard Jacobs, Toodies Fine Jewelry, Quincy, MA*

10 Every morning, I watch Golden Girls as I get ready for work. I get some of my best one-liners from Bea Arthur. — *Mary Jo Chanski, Hannoush Jewelers, Rutland, VT*

11 Down dog yoga poses in the middle of the floor. — *Meg Rankin, J. Rankin Jewelers, Edmonds, WA*



12 Each morning, I start the day with a self-made juice consisting of carrots, beets, ginger, celery, apples, lemon, green peppers, bananas (bitter melon in season) and spinach. — *Kent Bagnall, Kent Jewelry, Rolla, MO*



PROMOTE AFFORDABLE PRICE POINTS

The message this time of year should be about breaking down threshold resistance, says Bruce Freshley of Freshley Media, and making sure everyone is able to become a jewelry buyer for the holidays. Run a variety of ads in the same week: some that tout your prestige, others that promote low price-point items.

"Large, high volume stores figured out a long time ago that they can go up market and down market at the same time," Freshley says. "It's not a mixed message. It's saying there's something for everyone in the store. People will hear something and go, 'Wow, I didn't know that's only \$350. I'll just swing by there and get that.'"

Then, once customers arrive, make sure they can quickly identify something they think they can afford. Display a range of price points and group similarly priced items in clusters throughout the store, so that the boyfriend who knows he wants to spend \$500 doesn't have to keep jumping from case to case. Intersperse big-ticket items that'll jump out on their own.

Bill Elliott of Ross Elliott Jewelers in Terre Haute, IN, places assortments of merchandise in towers segregated by price ranges — under \$100, under \$250, under \$500 — in the last week before Christmas. "When we're busy, it works as a silent salesman, and it helps our salespeople qualify customers when they're running on fumes from the long hours. Men love it because they want to get in and out."



THE
BIG STORY



HOLIDAY



Last December, Brian McCall, owner of Midwest Estate Buyers in Zionsville, IN, was determined that unseasonably warm weather would not wilt his town's Christmas spirit.

There *would* be snow for the annual Christmas in the Village community parade. At least there would be in front of *his* store. He had purchased a snow machine to create a festive ambience and remind shoppers that Christmas was fast approaching.

Plus, it was just plain fun.

"I was harping about the \$500 it had cost, and then about half an hour into it, I knew it was the best thing ever, no question," McCall says. "We put the snow machine up on the roof and it was the hit of the entire parade. Kids were dancing in the street. People were going on and on about it. They'd come over and talk about it and want to come in. It ended up being a very good thing. It was a value-added thing, for the community."

And it did lead to sales.

While McCall dusts off his snow machine and climbs up onto his roof, check out our last-minute Q&A guide to making the most of the countdown to holiday 2014.

“ I was harping about the \$500 it had cost, and then about half an hour into it, I knew it was the best thing ever, no question.” **BRIAN McCALL**



START WITH YOURSELF

Q: WHAT SHOULD I DO PERSONALLY TO GET READY FOR THE HOLIDAYS?

A: “This is your time to shine. Get new clothes. It’s time for me to buy a new tuxedo,” says Errol Daly, general manager at Zachary’s in Annapolis, MD, who is known for his dapper sartorial presentation. “Customers come in and see you looking fabulous, and that gets them in a festive kind of mood. Wear your best every day. Look as nice as you possibly can because customers feed off you, they’ll come in and say, ‘wow.’ I’m very particular with my manicure, too. You don’t want to look like a mechanic with grubby fingernails.”

Q: HOW CAN I BALANCE EVERYTHING?

A: Go to as many parties and events as you’re invited to, to get your store’s name out there and remind people of the gift solutions you offer. But be sure to get lots of sleep, too, over the next six weeks. Cutting back on your Zs is a false trade-off if you’re trying to be more productive.

Q: WHAT’S A GOOD WAY TO KEEP FOCUSED?

A: It’s not only your books you need to keep balanced through December, it’s your blood sugar as well. “Research studies say that low blood sugar levels are associated with *lower* overall blood flow to the brain, which means *bad* decisions,” says Dr Mark Hyman, au-

thor of *The Blood Sugar Solution*. To keep your blood sugar stable he suggests: Eating a nutritious breakfast with some protein like eggs, protein shake or peanut butter. Then have smaller meals throughout the day. Eat every three to four hours, being sure to include protein with each snack or meal (lean animal protein, nuts, seeds or beans).

Q: HOW CAN I BOOST MY PROFILE IN THE COMMUNITY?

A: “We draw a lot of extra traffic to our store every December by doing a collection of gifts for the women and children at a local battered women’s shelter,” says Kathy Buccieri, of Buccieri’s Gems & Jewelry in Oak Ridge, NJ. “It is by far our most successful event every year and my daughters and I are always happy to deliver an entire vehicle of gifts to the shelter just days before Christmas. It has truly become a part of our Christmas tradition.”

Q: HOW CAN I STAY SHARP?

A: “Pace yourself and your staff,” says Bill Elliott of Ross Elliott Jewelers in Terre Haute, IN. “We try to give people as much rest as we can going into the final week. A tired staff creates all kinds of problems when the store traffic explodes in those last few days before Christmas.”

—▶◀—
Look sharp and your customers will feed off your festive spirit.





FINE-TUNE YOUR OPERATION

Q: HOW CAN I CREATE MORE TIME TO SELL?

A: The holiday season seems to become more condensed every year. Plan to open a little longer as the holiday period comes to its crazy end, advises Susan Schube, owner of Avalon Jewelers/Gallery in Zionsville, IN. “Extra hours open were totally worth it (last) year; we caught a lot of attention with our November/December art exhibit on our walls, which led to some good sales.”

Q: HOW CAN I ACHIEVE THE RIGHT HOLIDAY SCENT IN MY STORE?

A: “Including the right scent in your store during the holidays can be as important as the merchandising displays,” says Roger Bensinger, executive VP of Prolitec, whose AirQ service provides ambient scenting services to retailers and other businesses. “Holiday scents can be a lot of fun, adding a festive air to your store and putting customers in the buying mood. In general, the intensity should be barely perceptible to the average person. However, for brands that want to make a bold, multi-sensorial impression (consistent with visuals, music, lighting), the design of the scent and intensity of the delivery can be punched up for the appropriate effect.

Ask yourself:

→ What type of mood am I trying to create? A sense of home can be created through the use of traditional holiday scents like AirQ’s Christmas Tree and Mulled Spices, for example.


When it comes to hiring, nothing is more important than the ‘IT’ factor.



→ Will I be offering any refreshments during the holiday season? If so you might consider adding a scent such as coffee or peppermint latte to increase the impact.

Q: HOW CAN I AVOID RUNNING OUT OF SUPPLIES?

A: 1. Mike Doland of Doland Jewelers, in Dubuque and Davenport, IA, tries to have more than one source for all supplies – gift boxes, ribbon, bags, receipt paper, etc. – especially at this busy time. “I stock up big and pray that we have enough of everything based on last year. You’d think by now we’d have it all figured out but every year we get caught running short on something. It seems easier to get inventory because our vendors

are stocked up. Running out of certain paper supplies or the expendables is my pet peeve.”

2. Think about what happened last year: “We stock up on things we *know* we’ll need but last year forgot and ran out of! Little bags, change, mints, cash register tape, pens, extra earring backs,” says Erin McMichael Hess of Extinctions in Lancaster, PA.

Q: HOW CAN I MAKE A PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH TOP CLIENTS?

A: “I will be hiring a former employee, who loves to talk, for the sole purpose of calling my top 500 customers between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. daily until she is finished,” says Kent Bagnall of Kent Jewelry in Rolla, MO. “The intent is to leave a message on their voice mail that will 1) wish them a happy holiday season, 2) thank them for their past loyalty 3) encourage them to shop locally and 4) invite them into our shop so that we may help them with their holiday shopping list.”

Q: WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN TEMPORARY HELP?

A: “When looking to hire a new sales associate do not worry so much about jewelry experience because that can be taught to anyone,” says Emily Clark of Spath Jewelers in Bartow, FL. “When hiring someone who needs to be able to hit the ground running quickly

“ You’d think by now we’d have it all figured out but every year we get caught. Running out of paper supplies or the expendables is my pet peeve.” MIKE DOLAND

for the 4th quarter nothing is more important than the “IT” factor. If someone is great with people, a hard worker and energetic it trumps having decades of experience every day of the week and twice on Sundays! Look for someone who knows everyone in town. If they are friends with a customer already they are looked at as less of a salesperson and more of a friend giving them helpful advice on a sure thing sale.

Q: WHAT IS THE ONE THING SALES ASSOCIATES SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THIS TIME OF YEAR TO AVOID BLOWING A BIG SALE?

A: Sometimes your best customers will come out of nowhere and take you by surprise. “A few years into my job here, an older man came in in late November or early December,” says Donna Burgess, a \$1 million-plus sales associate for Occasions Fine Jewelry in Midland, TX. “He was dirty, his fingernails were dirty, and one pant leg was tucked into his boot that was covered in mud. One of the sales people walked around him to get to a couple coming in. I asked him what he needed, and he said, ‘I want a pair of white gold hoops.’ I asked him if he wanted diamonds, but he said he wanted plain white gold hoops. We picked out a pair and I asked him if he wanted me to wrap it up, but he said he needed another thing or two. He walked around the store and picked out things that were all less than \$5,000, but wound up with \$42,000 worth of jewelry. And then he said, ‘Oh, I didn’t bring the right credit card. But I can come back. Can you have everything gift wrapped for me tomorrow?’ He was very confident, not cocky, just confident, so I wondered about it, but I got everything gift-wrapped and he was there the next day with the card, dressed totally different. That makes an impression that you don’t forget.”



Always be ready: Sometimes your best customers will come out of nowhere.

DEVISE A SALES STRATEGY

Q: HOW CAN I CREATE EXCITEMENT FOR CUSTOMERS?

A: Lex Harrison of GM Jewelers sends a personal Christmas card to customers, telling them to come in for a surprise. “I do not tell them what it is; I say, ‘Come and see,’” Harrison explains. It could be a gift, credit, savings, a gift with purchase or a gift card from another store they partner with.

Q: HOW IMPORTANT IS BLACK FRIDAY WEEKEND?

A: Don’t stress about the lack of sales in the days after Thanksgiving, says Bruce Freshley, president of Freshley Media. Instead, focus on reaching out to new prospects and winning the battle for the “mind” of your marketplace. “Every year I say the same thing: ‘Black Weekend’ is for bargain shoppers and families. Men watch football or drive the family ‘truckster’ around from mall to mall. They don’t shop for jewelry. That’s why I preach ‘front loading’ December with trunk shows, sales and events ... anything to drive traffic and interest early in the month.”

Q: HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY HOLIDAY CLOSING RATIO?

A: Find the right balance between basics and

trends. “We always make sure we are well supplied with core pieces like stud earrings from 1/2-carat and up, solitaire pendants and diamond bands,” says Russ Franklin of Dunkin’s Diamonds in Fort Myers, FL. “We also try to stock the latest trending fashions projected to do well for the season. Last year we sold more customers than we turned away doing this, and it led to a 25 percent increase in business for December.”

ADJUST INVENTORY

Q: HOW CAN I ADD EXCITEMENT TO MY INVENTORY?

A: “Get some wow pieces of jewelry on memo — things that you would not necessarily buy for stock,” suggests Stan Mathews of Mathews Jewelers in Beaumont, TX.

Q: WHAT’S A SURE-FIRE WAY TO MAKE LAST-MINUTE SALES WITHOUT EXTRA INVENTORY?

A: “Catalog custom,” says Greg Stopka of JewelSmiths in Pleasant Hill, CA. “A lot of small independents are doing more custom, but then they get stuck at the end of the year when they can’t build a product because it’s too close to deadline. But if people are bringing in loose stones that they’ve bought on vacation or on a TV shopping network, focus on the shape and quality of the gemstone and look at what settings are available in a catalog (print or online). You can order and set it, and it’s a quick sale. It can get turned around in days. We do a lot of that.”

For more tips check out instoremag.com/lastminute



“Every year I say the same thing: Black Weekend is for bargain shoppers and families They don’t shop for jewelry.” BRUCE FRESHLEY



POLISH CUSTOMER SERVICE

Q: HOW CAN I MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY VISIT TO MY STORE?

A: “Make sure every person who walks in for any reason (battery sales included) sees/holds at least one piece of jewelry,” says Karla Doolittle, owner of Mark Jewellers in La Crosse, WI. “It’s amazing; if you show them something it opens the door to what they really want. If you get one out of 10 to hold it, you have a starting point to create a sale.”

Q: I’D LIKE TO INVITE NEW PEOPLE TO MY STORE AND MAKE THEM FEEL AT HOME HERE. ANY IDEAS?

A: M. Edward Jewelers in Pittsfield, MA, is trying a new event this year, called Paint & Sip. The store is teaming up with a local package store and a local artist, hosting 20 guests, in a relaxed and creative atmosphere, to complete a painting while they enjoy a wine tasting. “It’s a fun event to get people in the store,” says sales associate Carol Manfredo, adding that the event is more about easing threshold resistance than sales.



TWEAK MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Q: HOW CAN I PROMOTE MY STORE ORGANICALLY?

A: “I do an annual Twelve Days of Christmas promotion, where I package and ‘hide’ in plain sight one piece of jewelry every day,” says Elizabeth Breon of Coast Jewelers in Florence, OR. “It is in the spirit of giving, not selling. The goodwill generated could never be purchased through other advertising media. This is a small town and people talk about the promotion before and after it.”

Q: WHAT SHOULD MY WEBSITE LOOK LIKE AND HOW SHOULD IT FUNCTION?

A: “Populate your website with products, especially products that are in the store, or virtual products that the retailer has access to,” says Alex Fetanat, CEO of GemFind Network. “The customer is more sophisti-

cated, more tech-savvy, so they are looking for products — and if the products are not appearing, the jeweler is losing customers to competitors who do have products on their websites.”

Here are some points to consider:

The look should be clean and simple with a white background. Big images on the homepage are important. And scrolling tools are becoming popular, in which the user can scroll down and see everything on one page.

Images should be of professional quality. “You’re dealing with pieces that are worth thousands of dollars. It makes sense to invest \$20 or \$30 on a nice professional image,” Fetanat says. “I’ve seen sites that are beautiful but the images are terrible, and that really kills the website. At the end of the day, the products are what the customers are going to be looking at and what it is they are buying.”

It’s also vital for websites to be engaging and interactive. “The more the website is engaging, the more time customers are spending on the website, the better chance of conversion.” Tools such as ring builders, diamond links, watch builders and videos of the custom design process all help increase that chance of conversion.

“You’re dealing with pieces that are worth thousands of dollars. It makes sense to invest \$20 or \$30 on a nice professional image.” ALEX FETANAT

Q: IS THERE A QUICK FIX FOR MY WEBSITE?

A: Although it seems an overwhelming task, it is possible to make a website function well as a last-minute holiday strategy. GemFind, for example, has plug-and-play tools that can be implemented within 24 hours. A website redesign by GemFind would take 30 days using a template and 60 to 90 days for a custom job, Fetanat says.

Another way to improve your website quickly is to work with a professional to choose the right key words for search engine optimization and create a pay per click campaign. That strategy can make your website visible within hours, drive traffic to the website and ultimately to the store.

Remember, too, if you simply plug in a vendor's module to your website to show product it will show up as an embedded link, and Google won't recognize it. It's not search-engine-friendly in that format.

Q: HOW CAN TWITTER HELP DRIVE SHOPPERS TO MY STORE?

A: Have someone carefully follow Twitter and search for relevant, geo-targeted terms, says Adam Gebhardt, director of marketing for TIVOL in Kansas City. "For instance, our flagship TIVOL store is located in the Country Club Plaza. During the holiday season, I monitor tags or hashtags referencing the plaza, and then check out the content of the tweet. If it's an individual shopping for gift ideas or perhaps looking for a jewelry item, I tweet them back and invite them into the store. I'll offer a hot cup of coffee, cider, or maybe even a gift with purchase — whatever is appropriate for that particular customer."

Q: HOW CAN I ENGAGE WINDOW SHOPPERS AFTER HOURS?

A: "We installed a brochure holder outside our store so that window shoppers can pick up a brochure even when we are not open," says Karen Fonger of 58 Facets Jewelry in Alhambra, CA. "Our name and contact info are on every one of the pieces. We put holiday specials in the holder as well."



Last-Minute Display Changes That Will Improve Your Holiday Sales Performance

BY LARRY JOHNSON

CHANCES ARE, you have spent some serious time the last few months getting your merchandise selection ready for the holiday rush. Now, take a few minutes to review your cases to ensure they are ready to help you succeed. Start by looking at your full cases and asking yourself what impressions you want your customer to "get." What do you want most to sell? Does it stand out? Develop a plan identifying "My Intention" for each case. You may find your goals are easier to achieve when your objective from the beginning is clear. Here are a few ideas to help.

→ Decorate the store for the holidays but not the inside of the showcases.

Placing holiday décor inside the showcases has a tendency to make the case appear cluttered and confusing. The negative impact is even worse if the décor inside the case is shinier than the merchandise. Never use shiny trim inside the case. If you can't resist, use matte spray on any in-case props to avoid a conflict with the merchandise.

→ Pre-choose 12 holiday gift suggestions and place them in your showcases with gift-wrapped boxes. By selecting gift ideas and displaying them in cases around your store, you are influencing the choices your customers make. Be sure the suggested items cover all merchandise categories around your store and range in price from high to low. You'll sell more of these items, so price them at full margin.

→ Place the "best" items on individual displays near the back/center of each case. Do not display them in a tray with 11 other rings. They deserve more! The "best" items go on individual displays. Then use trays that hold



three or five pieces for "better" pieces and trays that hold seven, nine, or 12 for the (least expensive) "good" items.

→ Move the "dogs" to a special clearance case. If you have had a given piece of jewelry for more than 18 months, it no longer qualifies as a puppy, it is a full-grown dog! Get it out of the category case with your "saleable" items and in a special clearance case. Research shows shoppers will look at only about eight to 12 possible items before they decide if your cases are worth exploring further. Don't waste any of your 12 "possible shots" on a piece you have had since Nixon was in office.



→ Include signs with monthly payments on part of your selection. You'll find the same logic that prompted him to add a sunroof to his BMW for an extra \$32 a month may cause him to go for that bigger stone or the pair of earrings that matches the ring. Make it easy for the customer to say yes.

→ Rethink your store's space allocation for two months. So for example, your store normally has 6 feet of cases devoted to pearls, but you know pearls do not sell well for you during the holidays. Shrink the space allocated to your pearls to 18 inches. Convert that ex-pearl case to popular holiday items until Jan. 1. Look at your sales history and re-analyze the space allocation for your merchandise. You will sell more when you are displaying items that are more popular this time of year.

Larry Johnson is a jewelry merchandising consultant. Reach him through larry-johnsonconsulting.com.

THE BIG
STORY

ways of
christmas

By Eileen McClelland

It's no wonder [Christmas] can feel like do or die. Three-quarters of jewelers surveyed in INSTORE's 2010 Big Survey said the period between [Black Friday and New Year's Eve] accounted for 16 to 35 percent of their sales in 2009.

But holding your breath for six weeks can be counterproductive — painful, even. So go ahead, exhale. Let yourself be cautiously optimistic. The recession is officially over, and has been since June 2009, a fact that bodes well for a surge in consumer confidence.

David Brown of the Edge Retail Academy sees reason to be hopeful, despite lingering joblessness and mounting foreclosures. "I wouldn't say we are out of the woods," Brown says, but there is a lot more confidence at trade shows and buying-group meetings. There's a good feeling out there."

There's more good news.

As stressed as people feel these days about shopping, they do feel good about spending on gifts, according to a Harvard Business School survey.

So, the best thing you can do this season is to help your clients have confidence their money is well spent in your store, by providing outstanding customer service, great value and a sense of fun.

"The marketers who help the gift shopper have more fun this year will win," says Pam Danziger of Unity Marketing.

"To achieve this, retailers should put their best gift selections up front and center and make sure all sales staff are expert in helping the customer find a good gift from among the store's merchandise," she says. "They need to happily offer services to gift shoppers, such as quality gift-wrapping and rapid checkout. More than ever in this tough economic climate, customers want their expenditures to make them feel good."

The most important holiday-season week for



2009 sales was Dec. 21-27, followed closely by Dec. 16-20, according to INSTORE's Big Survey. That means you still have some time to fine-tune your Christmas plans.

But this time *next* year, you won't remember clearly the details of this year, so before you do anything else, start a daily Christmas 2010 journal, Brown says. Write down everything that works and why, everything that doesn't work and why not, what your competition (not just other jewelers) does and how it impacts you, who your best vendors are, who your best salespeople are, etc. Add copies of your advertising and record their impact on sales.



1

[zero in on hot sellers]

[ACTION PLAN] *Unload old inventory and reorder fast sellers immediately.*

TO PREPARE FOR NEW INVENTORY ON A TIGHT BUDGET, blow out old, slow-selling inventory before Black Friday and free up cash, says Russell Shor, GIA senior analyst. Cash buyers can command an excellent bargaining position, often 10 to 15 percent, because many vendors build the cost of payment terms into their prices.

Use the cash to buy goods that appeal to today's gift shoppers. Often, these will be items with distinctive looks at popular price points (in general, less than \$500). Check with your suppliers and other vendors who carry such goods.

One niche to consider: Unity Marketing studies have picked up on increased interest in men's jewelry and accessories, as men pay more attention to their appearance, looking for an edge in the volatile job market and falling under the nostalgic fashion influence of AMC's Emmy-winning "Mad Men."



After you determine likely best-sellers, look at your inventory and make sure your stock is adequate to fulfill the demand.

Then, as it sells, reorder *daily*, and re-stock immediately, Brown says, since any lag time in this area has a direct bearing on how long it takes to re-sell it. (Don't even open the mail until the stock is back on the shelf!) Don't forget to re-educate: Tell your staff it's back and exactly where it is.

[build relationships]

[ACTION PLAN] *Take notes; update your database; remember clients' names.*

2

MICHAELENE MASON,

a \$1 million seller at Devon Fine Jewelry in Wyckoff, NJ, is also a volunteer with Boy Scouts of America. Naturally, her motto is "Be Prepared." "My loupe, my pen and my case keys are my tools that I use all day long," she says. "I always have them on my person so I am prepared to make the sales. It

makes me look professional." Also in her arsenal is a small notebook. She *always* takes notes while she's talking to a customer, and reads her notes back to the customer to make sure she got it right.

As you listen to a customer describe what she's looking for in a piece of jewelry, jot down or make a mental note of any words that get to the heart of what she wants. Repeating key words in a subtle way can help close the sale. Another reason to take notes is you won't forget quotes you've given or promises you've made in

the holiday rush.

Mason files the notes, and enters data about transactions and wish lists.

This is a crucial step because according to INSTORE's Big Survey in October, 36 percent of 656 respondents said they *do not* keep customer information on file,



including birthdays and anniversaries.

Mason might have taken a page from Jack Mitchell's book, *Hug Your Customers*. He recommends building your database so that you have as much information on each of your customers as you do on any of your products. Get all the obvious stuff in there — as well as less obvious stuff like hobbies, pets' names, golf handicap, and preferred coffee flavor. Then, when you see them arrive in the parking lot, call up and print their profile for reference.

[set the scene]

[ACTION PLAN] Build your festivities around a reassuring theme.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE GOING TO NEED AROMATIC COFFEE AND FRESH-BAKED CHRISTMAS COOKIES, a seasonal scent like cinnamon, and music that at least hints at the holidays. (The Diamond Gallery in Winnipeg, Canada, swears by hot apple cider.)

Steve Quick Jeweler of Chicago took scene-setting a couple of steps further in 2009 by tying the theme of *It's a Wonderful Life* not only to store decorations, but to his Christmas party and sale, as well.

"It created a fun atmosphere," Quick says.

The 1946 movie classic ran continuously on the store's TV screens.

Quick hired a local actor with an uncanny resemblance to Henry Travers, who played Clarence the angel in the film.

During the store's sale event, the jewelry-store angel equipped himself with a recording of a bell ringing. As he approached each



customer, he sounded the bell and announced, "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets their wings." Customers chose an envelope that was stamped with an image of wings, each of which contained a coupon for a 20 to 50 percent discount.

"It was a great promotion, and the comforting theme helped to ease the uncertainty associated with spending money during the recession," Quick says. "I do think that people relate to the message of everyone pulling together. They appreciated that we were giv-

ing substantial discounts and it helped them be more comfortable that they could buy something. There was no downside."

If you are looking for something dramatic, look to your local community theater for both actors and set designers.

[cover all the bases]

[ACTION PLAN] Offer value and variety; convert bead customers.

PAM DANZIGER OF UNITY MARKETING SUGGESTS IN HER WEBINAR, "Putting the Luxe Back in Luxury," that retailers remain focused on value for even affluent consumers, who are looking for quality products that they can get for less. "Luxury consumers are saying, 'I don't need the best of the best.' They are looking for value, a middle ground between mass brand and ultra high end." So it's important to have all bases covered



— good, better and best.

Display a range of price points and group similarly priced items in clusters throughout the store, so that the boyfriend who just knows he wants to spend \$500 doesn't have to keep jumping from case to case. Intersperse big-ticket items that'll jump out on their own.

David Brown of the Edge Retail Academy has noticed a softening in bead sales lately, among entry-level jewelry store shoppers. "If you look at the growth of a product as being an arc, it has gone past the crest and is on the way down," Brown

says.

But that doesn't mean it's time to bail on the beads. What it *does* mean is it's time to examine your core business and reclaim the bridal and significant jewelry markets.

As beads draw customers into your store, Brown says it's essential to bring these collectors into your fold fully and not leave them on the fringes of your business. "Beads have created a significant increase in the consumer base, but adding to your customer base that way is smart *only* if you convert them to your own brand," Brown says.

5

[instill confidence]

[ACTION PLAN] *Guarantee the gift.*

BROWN SAYS that in recent years self-purchasing women have ventured into stores in search of beads and silver fashion, while men have been increasingly “let off the hook” from considering jewelry as a gift.

“In many cases, they’ve been taught not to bother,” Brown says. “What we want to do now is get men successful at buying jewelry again.”



Why is this such an important goal? Self-purchasing women will go only so far, Brown observes. “Women will buy themselves a \$1,200 gold bead or a silver piece, but if you showed them a \$1,200 pair of diamond earrings, they would often say they need to talk to their husband about that,” he says. And, of course, most women

aren’t buying themselves Christmas gifts.

“The key strategy is to help men to become successful,” Brown says. “Take the risk out of jewelry shopping.”

This is where the independents really can make a difference.

Ask questions to learn about the gift recipient and then let him know that if it’s not absolutely right for her, you’ll *make it right*.

Even more important, follow up with him *after* the presentation. “Ask him, how did we do? Did she love it? If not, let’s get her in here and get her what she does want,” Brown says.

Finally, establish a point of difference that would make it *insane* for customers to shop somewhere else. Wow your customers with Christmas gifts guaranteed to delight, along with extended warranties, added value (free lifetime battery replacements), loyalty credits, etc.

If your customer is successful with Christmas, he is going to be more confident than ever to choose jewelry over a gift certificate, when it comes to next year’s birthday or anniversary.



[focus charitable efforts]

[ACTION PLAN] *Give wisely to make the biggest splash.*

7

RETHINK YOUR CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS.

If you’re making donations all over the place, chances are, the positive impact on your business will be minimal. Instead, do one big charity event and put all your resources into that. It will make a bigger impact — both on the charity and your business. “Most businesses are probably

already doing more than they think they are,” says Nancy Schuring, owner of Devon Fine Jewelry in Wyckoff, NJ. Schuring founded the Devon Foundation, a non-profit organization that offers Madagascar’s residents scholarships to attend the Institute of Gemology of Madagascar. She decided to concentrate on a cause related to the industry after realizing how many scattershot contributions she was making without significant return. The resulting community goodwill and media coverage have boosted her business by at least 25 percent — during the

recession.

Borsheims partners with a local Omaha, NE, charity each year during the fourth quarter. Related events and advertising are combined with a Giving Tree. The tree is a centerpiece of the holiday decor, and also the setting from which Borsheims’ boxes are sold, containing anything from specially designed jewelry to gift cards. All proceeds go directly to the charity. The first weekend of December is designated as a weekend of giving. Volunteers from the charity interact with customers, helping to raise awareness for their cause.

Sales from boxes under Borsheims’ Giving Tree benefit a local charity.



[customize the shopping experience]



6

A Gem Bar lets people pick a stone and have it set in 24 hours.

[ACTION PLAN] Invite participation and input.

IN ALL AREAS OF RETAIL, customers have come to expect an opportunity to get exactly what they want, and quickly. Providing the materials that allow clients to build their own charm or bead bracelet is a simple way to encourage client creativity and ownership. But there are other ways.

Mark Loren, owner of Loren Designs in Fort Myers, FL, is introducing a Gem Bar in his store, beginning in early November. He'll display little pockets of gems, such as loose citrines and peridots, along with a dozen or so styles of pre-made settings. Customers can choose a stone, choose a setting and have a custom piece of jewelry ready to go in 24 hours.

Loren is also inviting customers to vote for sketches of their favorite custom designs on his Facebook page, and offering them incentives to do so. "We scan the stones and pop them into the sketches, so it looks more like a photo than a



sketch."

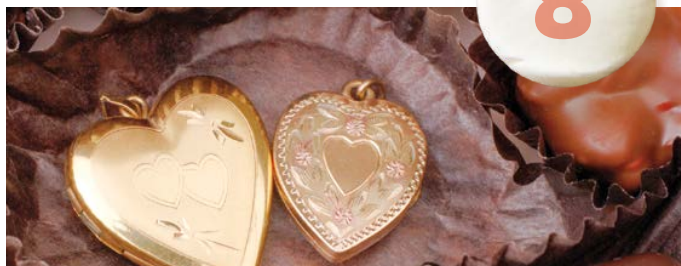
Loren plans to tally the votes by Thanksgiving, select 12 popular designs and render pieces priced at \$2,500 to \$5,500 as new inventory. "We're giving our clients what they have communicated they want, and still allowing us to express our own creativity," he says.

[promote yourself]

[ACTION PLAN] Consider what sort of promotion will bring the most attention to your business.

MARK LOREN celebrated his store's 20th anniversary in 2009 with a 12 Gems of Christmas promotion, collaborating with his friend Norman Love, a chocolatier, who owns a nearby retail shop and factory. They agreed to share promotional expenses.

During the 12 days before Christmas, Loren planted 12 pieces of jewelry (value \$300 to \$2,500) in random boxes of chocolate sold through Love's retail outlet. It was



an exceptionally successful promotion, reflected in sales being up in 2009 after an extraordinary surge in news coverage.

All of Loren's promotional ideas are fine-tuned by a PR professional.

"She's got an objective perspective on how the media might see it," Loren says.

Here's a simple idea that may get you noticed by the media: *Every* media outlet is looking for easy-

to-produce stories that tie into the holidays. Jennifer Wezensky, owner of JW Public Relations in Michigan, suggests developing a feature story about the top jewelry gifts for Christmas. "The hope is that they will go to your store to purchase these gifts, of course, but you can't be too pushy or sales-focused in your efforts," she says. Send the press release to the feature editors of daily and community newspaper and broadcast TV news-assignment editors. Follow up with a phone call and/or e-mail to these harried people, otherwise they may not notice your pitch.

[modernize your marketing]

[ACTION PLAN] *Spruce up your website and spend time on social networking.*

IF YOU'RE STILL NOT USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO MARKET YOUR STORE, you're missing a significant resource for reaching your audience through word of mouth, endorsements, networking and referrals, says Bob Epstein, president of Silverman Consultants. It's an ideal way to keep customers informed of in-store specials, new products and promotions.

Most social media outlets are free and easy to use, but they have to be managed in order to be current and fresh. All that takes *time*, so designate who's in charge of monitoring those channels and oversee it with care.

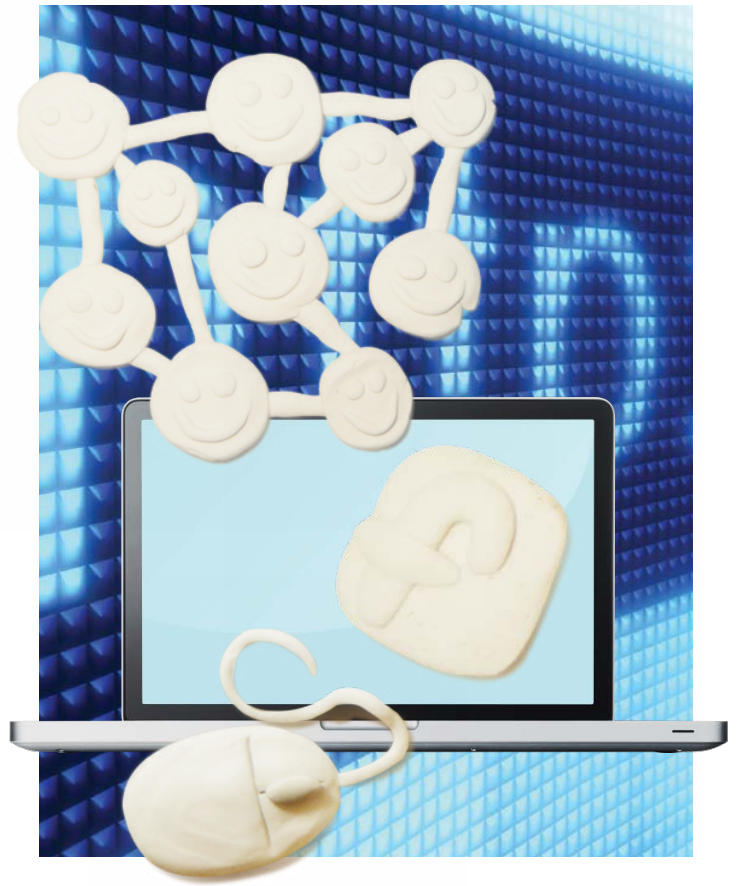
Rex Solomon, who has 1,500 Facebook followers for Houston (TX) Jewelry, says he updates Facebook while watching TV. His Facebook postings become Twitter feeds automatically.

At the very least, build an online community on your own website. Hire a photographer to take pictures of everyone who attends your holiday party and get their permission to post the photos on your website.

Display photos and bios of sales staff to make it easier for customers to find them and connect via e-mail.

Don't be shy. Introduce yourself as the owner on your site and consider writing a blog.

Inspire passion for your brand by building personality into your website, say David Meerman Scott and Brian Halligan, authors of *Marketing Lessons from the Grateful Dead*. Remove any content that looks similar to your competitors'. Delete what's boring. Make sure your website, blog posts, newsletters and e-mails are unlike all others in the marketplace. Your job is to create an experience that's unique and one they become passionate enough about to want to talk up.



[wish upon a list]

[ACTION PLAN] *Get more people to fill out wish lists, which are superb marketing tools and the best possible excuse to make a direct-marketing contact to a new client.*

ELAINE PIEPER, a \$1 million seller at Clarkson Jewelers in St. Louis, MO, suggests photographing customers wearing their favorite jewelry during a wish-list event, and then e-mailing the photos to their significant others. "It's easy to send people pictures of things their wives would like to have, or things they are trying to decide upon," she says.

At Carl Greve Jewelers of Portland,



OR, a holiday theme of "Holiday Wishes Do Come True" in 2008 was reflected in holiday parties over three nights, and in a four-week e-mail/website marketing campaign. Each Friday between Thanksgiving and Christmas, an e-mail

was sent to all customers, highlighting the staff's personal wish lists with a weekly theme: Bold cocktail rings, timeless classics, jewelry for him and timepieces. The e-mail provided a link to the website, which contained many more items, refreshed each week.

Guests called to inquire about the pieces, and often referred to the wish-list suggestions when they attended store parties or shopped in the store.

The campaign was a success, store personnel say, because it was inspirational, personal and human.

If you try this, ask the staff to blog about why they chose specific items.



[do make a spectacle of yourself]

[ACTION PLAN] *Do something unusual to attract attention.*

DO SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE.

Sometimes making a scene is the best advertising you can buy.

10

Rex Solomon employs 18 Santas at Houston Jewelry to hold signs announcing, “Santa Shops at Houston” from Black Friday to New Year’s Eve. He’s marketing to the 70,000 to 80,000 drivers that pass his business each day. At night, he illuminates the exterior of the building with movie lights to create a festival atmosphere and highlight the costumed sign-walkers. “We get people honking and waving and taking pictures with their kids,” Solomon says. “It is the single most effective advertising media we have.”

Don’t have the budget for 18 Santas? Bay Area Diamond Co. in



From Santas in Houston, TX, to Santa’s elves in Bozeman, MT.

Green Bay, WI, installs one Santa at the store for several weeks in December to greet kids and pass out goodies. It’s become such a tradition that the store gets calls every year asking when, exactly, will Santa arrive.

At Alara in Bozeman, MT, sexy jewelry models pose in the store’s

old-fashioned window wells during the community’s annual Christmas Stroll. They blow kisses, flirt through the glass, and convert untold numbers of passersby into prospective customers. For a donation to a local nonprofit, customers can pose for a photo with an elf, getting them even more

involved.

Llyn Strong Fine Jewelry is known for making it snow in Greenville, SC, every afternoon, Black Friday through Christmas. While children enjoy the rare precipitation outside, adults indulge in a hot mug of coffee, spiced cider or a glass of bubbly inside.

[ask ‘who else is on your list?’]

[ACTION PLAN] *Add-on sales are easier during the holidays than at any other time; all you have to do is say the magic words,*

says Shane Decker of Ex-Sell-ence Sales Academy.

12

EVERYONE’S GOT A LONG LIST OF PEOPLE WHO NEED GIFTS

— an average of 15,

Brown says. *Assume* that those gifts will be jewelry. Have a brainstorming session with your team about how to genuinely help your customers buy as many of their 15 gifts from you as possible — a good reason to have products for all ages, all budgets and both sexes.

Consistently ask each and every customer (even if they’ve already bought three items), “Is there anyone else you still have to buy for that I may be able to help you with?” Remember, this is being helpful, not pushy, Brown says. Incentivize your employees to make it an automatic part of the sales system. As soon as the customer commits to buying the first piece, say, “OK, that’s done. So who else is on your list?” Shane Decker says.

David Runnels, the veteran store manager of Benold’s Jewelers in Austin, TX, often mentions to customers, even if they’ve just stopped by for a new watch battery, “I’ve got a really good buy on a 5-carat diamond.” Some



chuckle, but he’s sold several that way.

Still not sure it’ll work?

Women in particular have a multitasking mind-set, according to Bridget Brennan, author of *Why She Buys: The New Strategy for Reaching the World’s Most Powerful Consumers*. Women tend to group errands together to maximize productivity. This makes them open to picking up products that weren’t on their list because buying something now will save them a trip later.

Female shoppers are always thinking ahead to the next occasion, as well. Add-ons don’t have to be limited to holiday-season gifts.