



BY PHIL SASSO,
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Q I'm a new dealer. I hear holiday season sales can really suck. What can I do from Thanksgiving through New Year's — other than live off my savings?

A Holiday season sales can really slack off if you aren't careful about your purchasing and marketing planning. Like any retailer, you need to adjust your inventory and promotions to the seasonal changes in your customer's buying habits.

If you're proactive, your holiday sales can be no different than any other month, says Mac Tools District Manager Jim Holtz. Or you might even experience your best month yet. Holtz says when he was a dealer, December sales were among his strongest.

Stocking stuffers

Be sure you stock up on your flag or WD's holiday gift offerings. Your customers may cut back on what they

Have Yourself A Merry Little Tool Truck

Make holiday season sales more jolly!

spend on themselves at year end, but they will be spending money on both big and little gifts for family and friends.

"Last year, we sold out of Mac branded slot-car race tracks," says Holtz. Mac corporate headquarter

ters acted quickly and brought in a fresh inventory of John Force Racing drag race tracks to fill the gap. But if you aren't quick on the draw, you may find once an item is sold out you'll be out of luck. So ask your DM and the veteran dealers from your flag what sold well for them in the past. Take their lead and be sure you're stocking the right stuff.

Many dealers use holiday flyers to push seasonal sales.

One "rogue" dealer tosses his flag's flyers, favoring a holiday display instead.

Nothing beats seeing and touching an item to sell it, says our rogue. He also creates a sense of urgency by reminding customers there's only a limited supply of holiday items. If he runs out of something, he won't get more before Christmas.

Whether you choose flyers, a shelf display or both, the earlier you start promoting your offerings, the better jump you'll get on your competition.

Outside the (gift) box

An associate told me of a husband-and-wife that teamed up and cleaned up over the holidays. The wife, who sold Avon or Mary Kay, put together little gift bags for the dealer to carry on his truck. Customers bought gifts for the women in their lives, paying cash for each purchase, and the couple cashed in on the yuletide buying spree as they spread a bit of the holiday joy.

Holtz and his wife mailed Christmas letters to his customers' wives and

girlfriends. In the letter, he noted that if the women were looking for gift ideas, his truck would be parked in a popular shopping mall's lot on a specific day during specific evening hours. A lot of significant others took him up on his offer — most buying gift certificates.

These last two clever couples didn't just boost sales, they actually boosted cash flow, too.

Q What else can I do to turn around the slow Christmas collections season?

A With more of their money going to holiday gifts, meals and decorations, your customers may have less money jingling in their pockets to make their monthly payment.

If you can turn collections from the drudgery of bill paying into a festive game, you are more likely to maintain your turns and see collections stay constant — or maybe even spike slightly. One veteran dealer says he is most successful holding a drawing every week between Thanksgiving and New Year's. The giveaway can be relatively small, say a cooler or a simple jacket, but the payoff can be big.

Drawing in sales

Here's a fun raffle idea from 24-year Mac veteran Tom Neamon. I'll call it the Grab Bag Raffle: Get five different prizes. Neamon spends about \$1,000 on prizes like PlayStations, stereos or TVs. Inside each of five envelopes, put the name of one prize.

Two weeks before Christmas, start the promotion. Week one, any customer who spends \$100 or more (or \$20 over their usual payment, or whatever goal you want to set) gets to



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put their name into that day's drawing box. On Monday of week two, have the first person on your truck draw a winner from the Monday box. That winner gets to choose a prize envelope and picks the name of the Tuesday winner from that box. The drawing continues each day until the last winner is picked from the Friday box.

Neamon likes to post photos of winners with the name they drew to show that everything is above board. Boosting sales this month will mean boosting historically slow January collections, too.

Another non-collections cash flow boost is selling shop owners gift cards for their techs. Many dealers find the best time to approach shop owners is between mid-November and the week after Thanksgiving before they've made another decision. The gift cards can also serve to bring in new customers who normally buy from another flag.

Q My wife decorates my truck and bakes cookies for the holidays. At first I thought she was nuts, but I think it's helped me keep sales up while some dealers are slow this season. What do you think?

A Your wife is pretty smart. Deck your truck with boughs of holly and you may just find yourself fa-la-la-la-lal-ing all the way to the bank.

Neamon says decorating the truck and being in the Christmas spirit is key. Take a cue from retailers on spiffing up the place. Look at Walgreens, Walmart, Target and other retailers for ideas. Decorating your truck can subconsciously put your customers in the mood to buy.

"I tied a wreath to the front of my truck for the holidays when I was a dealer," says Holtz. Some guys go further and decorate the inside of the truck, even

stringing up holiday lights.

Consider rewarding your best customers with something extra special. Holtz suggests spreading the joy by giving customers 10-percent-off coupons to buy their own gift. He says the more they buy, the bigger their gift. When he was a dealer, he gave coupons to shop owners, managers and service writers. He was surprised by how many non-customers called him to get a tool for a family member or friend. (Be sure your phone number is on the coupon so non-customers can call you.)

Neamon creates a package of small flag-branded gifts with his name on them: calendars, pens, mugs and the like, usually spending about \$10 or \$15 a packet. He gives these to everyone he sees — customers, salesmen, shop owners. It's a smart strategy: he's giving away advertising disguised gifts and customers are grateful for his thoughtfulness. You can't beat that! ■

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