

Leveraging your Holiday Sales Volumes and Getting your Business in the Consumer's Minds.

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**By James R. Sanders**

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As people hustle and bustle about trying to get those last minute gift ideas ready before the big day hits, spending is up and sales run rampant, as marketers get ready for that special time of year. Yes, Christmas time is here again, and every marketer drifts off to slumber with thoughts of dollar signs running through their heads. Almost everyone wants to increase their sales, do better than last holiday season, or do some last minute power selling to boost this year's sales numbers. But what about the shoestring mom and pop companies operating on limited budgets? How are they to compete with the marketing gargantuan and their never-ending deep-flowing coffers of cash? You might not believe it, but there are closer and less expensive means to compete, and you could find that most of the gargantuan don't even take advantage of them, especially if you offer goods or services limited to a geographical area.

Does the Consumer Know your Products or Services can be Classified as a Gift?

So, you lack the large marketing budget for radio and TV commercials, and running additional print ads are out of the budget too, what can you do to increase your sales while getting your company in the minds of the consumer? The first thing I would ask you is if you have changed your ads around

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to take advantage of the giving approach. It is the season of giving isn't it? Then how have you changed your ads to reflect the happiness of receiving your goods or services as a gift? Have you even bothered to give the consumer the idea that your goods or services CAN be given as a gift? If you haven't, then maybe they've never thought of giving your goods or services as a gift, or that anyone could even be happy receiving them as a gift either. If the consumer doesn't perceive your goods or products as a potential "gift", then you are going to lose out on holiday sales. Around this time of year, most people are in "gift buying" mode. The more you can get your goods or services perceived as a potential "gift", the better chances you will elevate your sales during this giving season.

### Differentiating Yourself from the Competition – Impulse Sales, Up–Sells, Back–End Sales and Other Promotions.

Now you've altered your ad copy to reflect your products or services as gifts, what benefits do you offer over your competitors? Almost every business is running some sort of special or discount as an enticement for shoppers to buy. Are you doing the same? At this stage of the seasonal game, anything you can do to set yourself apart from the competition is going to be beneficial to your goals of increased holiday sales. Just don't be too greedy. Find a happy medium of sales discount that will still provide comparable profit cushion to what you usually enjoy during the normal sales season. Look for creative ways to encourage the impulse sales along with up–sells and back–end sales promotions. Say for instance, you are going to offer a coffee maker in your sales. You could discount coffee and maybe offer free filters with a purchase. Take a close look at how your products or services relate to one another, and then offer freebies and discounts on other products or services that compliment your sales item. All of these areas will help you enjoy increased sales during the holiday season.

### Testimonials - Letting Past Customers Tell Others About your Goods or Services.

Do you have customer testimonials about your goods or services? Maybe you have testimonials about your sales or service. These are additional tools to pull out of your

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marketing arsenal, especially during this time of year. The best ones are the ones that talk about how happy they were when receiving your goods or services as a gift, or how someone felt giving your goods or services as gifts, but any others that show those goods or services in a positive way will work. The non-solicited type of testimonial works the best, but again, any testimonial from a previous customer to show potential customers your goods or services values will work. Keep these testimonials handy for sales presentations, or you can put them out on display in your shop. Always be sure to ask the writer's permission before showing their written works. Believe it or not, those are copyrighted works owned by your customers. Although any customer suing you over using them is less than likely, it's always, better to be safe than sorry.

### Gaining Consumer Awareness the Economical Way - College Campus Community Boards.

Now that you have your ad copy tweaked, and you've planned your up-sells, back-end sales, and impulse buys, what are the economical ways of gaining market share? There are many ways to get creative here. Do you live in an area where there is a local college? Colleges are known for their information boards. You'll find them around eating areas, campus office areas, and in many dorm areas. This is a no cost way to promote and market your company to the younger crowd looking for gifts on this holiday of gift giving. If you can find ways to convey the value your goods or services can offer to their friends and loved ones and the happiness those friends or loved ones would feel from receiving your products or services as a gift, then you will reap increased sales from that market. You'll find the gargantuan competition fairly limited in this advertisement medium. It's a chance for you to target your sales without competing with the deep pockets and over-flowing coffers the gargantuan has.

### Grocery Store and Other Community Boards.

What about your local grocery store? EVERYONE has to eat don't they? Most of them have community boards where they allow you to post index card sized ads. Prepare a few attention getting index cards before you make your normal store run. On your way out of your grocery store, take a few

moments to post your ad. If you have more than one grocery store chain in your area, then you might consider spending some additional time visiting the others too. You could justify the time spent by shopping around and doing some price comparisons between the other chains and your favorite store. Not only could you gain increased holiday sales, but you might also find a more economical grocery store for your grocery needs. Be creative, honest, and sincere, and you will enjoy increased sales through your marketing efforts.

However, it doesn't just stop at grocery stores. Think of the number of places you shop for your needs. How many others have the same type of board available to their customers? Every one of those boards is a potential gold mine for cheap marketing needs. And with all the shopping I'm sure you will be doing this giving season, I'll bet you'll find that more places have these boards than what you initially considered. While fulfilling your gift giving requirements, take the time to visit shops you've never set foot in. If they don't have a board, you might get an idea for another marketing type you can apply to your own business. Keep your eyes and mind open. Look at the sales while you shop, the ads, and the displays. Think of the

reasoning those marketers used when putting it all together and see if you can't find new and creative ways to market your own goods or services.

#### Ad Material Swap with Other Local Businesses.

Christmas is a giving time of year. It's a time to get together, closeness, and doing things for people you might not usually do. Everyone knows someone who runs a business. Why not swap ad material and promote each other? Granted, if the person is a direct competitor, this might not be so easily done, and maybe you shouldn't do it to begin with. If the businesses are at different ends of the spectrum, say one sells firewood and the other sells ice, then it might not be so affective, but if this person runs a business that somewhat compliments your own, then the payoff for both businesses could be substantial. One of my brother's runs a Mobile DJ business. He used to team up with local caterers, bridal shops, tuxedo rental shops, stationary shops, and the list goes on. How many business owners do you know with shops that compliment your own goods or services while not

directly in competition with you? It's a win-win situation for everyone involved. It even benefits the customers with the names and addresses of other shops to meet their needs. Your customers will thank you for your information to help them meet their needs, and best of all, it requires little effort especially if you know the other shop owner personally.

#### The Joint Venture.

This next one might take some time to put together and it relates to the swap mentioned in the last paragraph, so you might keep this in mind for next season. Joint Ventures are the next big marketing craze. Most often referred to as JV's, this is similar to the swap, but it's usually more permanent and better-targeted marketing. The joint venture concept means taking a look at your products or services, and then identifying other businesses that compliment those products or services and entering into joint marketing ventures. It's kind of like a cooperative advertising type deal that allows you to pool resources, but it's not just for placing ads as an ad cooperative is. The JV is used to leverage sales for ALL businesses involved, but the most critical point is ensuring that your JV partners businesses **COMPLIMENT** your goods or services; **NOT COMPETE** with them.

Take my company for instance, Sanders Consultation Group Plus. I do business consultation, digital and print media

marketing, web site design, image/graphic creation and editing, search engine optimization and placement, and just about anything related to business operations and marketing. My oldest brother runs his own computer shop where he does computer custom builds, repairs, upgrades, virus removal and data recovery, and even offers on site computer services. Big brother knows what I do and knows I like doing it. He also knows I'm good, although he is probably biased as he is my brother . Big brother decided he wanted to offer his customers the things I provide, and asked me if I would be willing to JV with him to offer his customers my services. Big brother is good, and he has a stable and growing customer base. I jumped at the opportunity because it was a sound business opportunity. His customer base includes local small businesses. That alone increases my potential for new web site design and business consultation

sales. It's a win-win situation. My brother's customers can get all their services under one roof, and so can mine. If I have a customer looking for computer related services, then I send them off to my brother. If he has a customer needing web site design or marketing, then he sends them off to me. We save the customer time and they get a discount on the other brother's services.

The concept doesn't stop at relative business owners. We both have a relationship with a local ISP. I've come to the conclusion that there is money to be made in home based business opportunities, since I do run one myself, and so does my big brother. The home based business sector is growing in leaps and bounds. Almost everyone has looked into starting his or her own business at one time or another. There's too many people unhappy with their jobs. But with all the information readily available on home based business opportunities, there's all of frauds out there taking people's money and offering nothing of real substance in return. What's a way to help people realize their self-employment dreams while decreasing the danger they will be ripped off? Offer a FREE seminar on starting your own home based business. That is my present JV with my big brother and our local ISP. How do our companies benefit? We benefit by getting out there in the minds of our local potential customers. Start-up businesses need things like computers, web site hosting, dial up accounts, and web site design. By giving them this seminar to show them the different types of home based businesses, how to find a reputable business, and how to keep from getting ripped off in the process, we gain a pool of potential customers to market our products to. In giving them this information freely and keeping them from being ripped off, who do you

think they are going to come to when they need hosting and dial up, computers and computer services, or web site design and marketing needs? Are you getting the picture of the power behind JV opportunities?

## Summary

This is not an all-inclusive article. There are many more ways to leverage your holiday sales goals while spending economically. Use this article to inspire you and get your mind turning. Use the principles provided and see how many

other ideas you can come up with. Be creative, honest, and set yourself apart from the competition. Show them the benefit of using your goods or services as a gift. If you can accomplish that task, then you will assuredly benefit from increased sales this holiday season. Now hurry up and get going. You only have a few more days until the big day hits. Until next article, may your holiday season be blessed with joy and success, and may 2005 be an even better year for all.

## **Online Holiday Shopping Sales Meet Record Breaking Expectations**

**By Robert Benson**

As the dollar figures pour in and the numbers are tabulated and with business analysts predicting a record breaking online holiday shopping season, it appears the projections were right on target.

Although the final holiday shopping sales figures aren't in yet, preliminary reports from a wide spectrum of sources point to online sales that have met expectations and will make e-tailers, large and small, very satisfied with the results.

According to comScore, the latest "2005 Online Holiday Shopping Update" reflects that non-travel spending for the first 46 days of the holiday season (November 1–December 16) totaled 15.86 billion dollars. This represents a 23% increase over the same period in 2004. In addition, comScore estimates that U.S. Internet sales will exceed 19 billion dollars (excluding travel) for the holiday season, an increase of 24% above 2004 sales figures.

What were the best selling days during this online shopping period? What were the sales for the highly anticipated "Black Monday"?

The results are in and surprisingly, Monday, November 28 (Black Monday) ranked ninth in a listing of the top ten non-travel online holiday shopping spending days among U.S. home, work and university Internet users for the holiday shopping period of November 1–December 16, 2005, with online sales estimated at 484 million dollars.

The top selling day? So far, that distinction goes to Monday, December 12, 2005, with total sales of 556 million dollars. A close second was Tuesday, December 13, 2005, with sales of 554 million dollars and astonishingly these two days combined topped 1.1 billion dollars in online retail sales.

Furthermore, according to the latest "Holiday eSpending Report", (released by Goldman Sachs, Nielsen/Net Ratings and Harris Interactive), it is estimated that online shoppers spent 18.6 billion dollars during the first six weeks of the 2005 holiday season (October 29–December 9), a 16% increase for U.S. online spending compared to the same period in 2004.

To summarize, these preliminary reports offer a positive outlook for e-tailers as the e-commerce

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industry continues to evolve and prosper. Internet users are taking advantage of new web sites, specialty sites and shops, virtual online shopping malls, niche marketing and the holiday sales figures reflect this phenomenon.

Robert Benson operates

a web site devoted to helping users find

unique gifts in unique places with a wide assortment of merchandise to choose from including home decor, collectibles, novelties, three stooges memorabilia, apparel, novelties and more.



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