

letters from our readers

ask a pro Shopping Trade Shows



Making a Great First Impression

In the last issue, Barbara Crowhurst's *First Impressions* story provided a starting point for a recent staff meeting which has re-energized our employees to put their best foot forward and treat each customer like company. We need to give our customers a level of service that's not found in the big-box stores. It's what sets us smaller retailers apart from the crowd in this day and age.

SUE HYATT GRIFFITHS
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What's your advice when it comes to trade shows?

First of all, you have to attend major trade shows at least once a year to stay abreast of what's going on in the industry, and do a lot of prep work before you leave.

- Before you attend each show, review the performance of the various categories you carry. Is it time to add new categories and drop others? A detailed review of your numbers will help you decide.
- Know what your competition is carrying and stay away from it.
- Survey your customers to see what they want you to add to the product mix.
- Get rid of your dogs with a clearance sale to make room for new merchandise and inject cash into the business.
- Set buying budgets. You shouldn't be spending more than 55 per cent of your yearly sales on new products.
- Take pictures of your store, displays and fixtures to the show, so you have a clear idea of how much product you need to buy.
- Buy trendy products – they're what drives your business – and read up on colour trends before you go to ensure you're bringing in the looks your customers will be wanting.

- Take the time to attend a few seminars. Coming back to the store with new products and new ideas is what trade shows are all about.
- Do a quick look-see on the first day. Make some notes, see what's happening. Then, start your buying the next day with a plan and a budget.
- Dress comfortably and invest in a wheeled portfolio. Hands-free shopping is a must for success. ■

Book a free consultation with Barbara Crowhurst at the Fall 2008 CGTA Gift Show. To reserve your spot, e-mail retailmakeovernewsletter@barbaracrowhurst.com.

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