

Let Holiday Season Propel Your Small Business All Year

The holiday season generates substantial revenues, as well as browsers, for most small businesses.

That means the owner and all of the employees are very busy. So business owners are not looking to add more to the list of things to do during this time of year.

“Yet, small-business owners need to remember this may be the only time during the year that this customer enters the store,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “It’s great to have that one-time sale or shopper, but wouldn’t you like to make that person a regular patron?”

So the holiday season is a great time to build your customer list of the future.

However, building the list need not be painful for the customer, for your employees or for you. Three or four pieces of information are all you need, and that information can be gathered in your normal conversation as the customers check out.

Some business owners gather the information as they offer complimentary gift wrapping, coffee or maybe a cookie. All of these reinforce your brand, even if the customer doesn’t use the gift-wrapping service or want the coffee or cookie.

So what are the questions?

- What brought you in today?
- What made you decide to stop here?
- How was your experience?
- Can we get your email address?

Dedicate an employee to the task or even do it yourself as the owner. A small expenditure of time and money can have a big return.

“Respect the customers’ time,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “Be sure to offer something of value right at the moment, as well as something for their next visit.”

One item that works well and helps get the email address is a substantial discount certificate you will send them for an after-the-holiday sale.

“Don’t forget your loyal customers, either” reminded (Insert last name). “Thank them for their patronage, ask them why they stopped in when you know they have other choices, and promise to send them the discount.”

Then when the holiday season is over and things get quieter, reconnect with the people whose name you gathered. Thank them for their support, have that promised big event, and start building a relationship or expand the connection you already have.

The holiday season may bring a quick boost in your sales. Why not make it great for developing your group of loyal customers?

Contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address] for additional ways to build your business. Also visit NDSU's small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske.

Other resources include <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and SCORE, also can be valuable resources.

###

For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.