

# SALES BOOST

Ramp-Up Holiday Season Revenue

By Christopher Ruvo

## THE ADVANTAGES QUIZ:

# Are You Maximizing Holiday Season Sales?



Do you start laying the groundwork for holiday season sales before Q4?		<p><b>ANSWER KEY:</b></p> <p>Yes = 3 points            To an extent, but I could do more = 1            No = 0</p> <p><b>What Your Score Means</b></p> <p><b>24-30: Impressive!</b> You're putting yourself in a great position for holiday sales success.</p> <p><b>16-23:</b> You're doing well when it comes to holiday sales efforts, but you could be doing even better.</p> <p><b>15 &amp; Below:</b> Your holiday sales stand to benefit from a more proactive, strategic approach.</p> <p>Regardless of your score, the advice in the pages ahead will help you increase sales during the most festive time of year.</p>
Do you know your clients' holiday gifting budgets?		
Do you proactively present gift ideas to customers?		
Do you base your gift suggestions on the tastes and needs of recipients?		
Do you provide any custom products for holiday gift programs?		
Have you ever suggested that clients send a New Year's gift in early January?		
Do you sell holiday cards?		
Do you provide your clients with high-end gifts for executive end-users?		
Do you prepare the holiday gifts you'll send to clients in advance of the season so you have maximum sales time during the end-of-year rush?		
Do you reach out to clients and prospects to alert them to product deals as they arise during the holiday season?		

# SALES BOOST

## Step 1

# Start Early

Keep competitors at bay by getting in front of the holiday madness.

John Helder believes it's vital to stay ahead of the game.

As many people are starting their New Year's resolution exercise routines, the branded merchandise resourcer for HALO Branded Solutions (asi/356000) is already thinking about the next holiday season.

In particular, Helder is at industry trade shows in January keeping a keen eye out for hot new products he can pitch to clients for the holiday gift-giving they'll do come year's end. "I write about a third of my annual business in or for the fourth quarter," he says. "It's important that I do everything I can to make it a success. I start early – talking to clients about what we can do for the holidays before my competitors do."

Indeed, as Helder works with clients on other projects, he lays the seeds for potential holiday sales by mentioning products and branding concepts that he feels will be an ideal fit for the customers' holiday initiatives – ideas he has sometimes stowed from his early-year product hunting. "Things really intensify from September on," says Helder. "If I can go into that time of year having set a sale in place or narrowed things down to a few items for my clients, that benefits us both."



This approach has helped Helder orchestrate many lucrative orders.

One such deal with a construction company tallied approximately \$10,000. Through the year, Helder worked closely with the client, providing a variety of items, from shirts and hats to pens, can coolers, water bottles and more. When Helder turned the discussion to holiday gifts in advance of the fourth quarter, he was rewarded with good news: The client was having a ban-

ner year and wanted to provide employees with a special gift.

Here, Helder's proactive scouting paid off: He had seen a high-end Carhartt jacket that he felt would be perfect. He pitched the outerwear item, and the client loved the idea, purchasing 100 pieces that received a left-chest embroidered logo. "The jacket had a high perceived value. It was an excellent way of saying thanks for a great year. It was exactly the kind of gift that employees wanted," Helder says.



## 3 Tips To Be the Early Bird

► **Start Pre Q4:** Begin discussing holiday gift and promotion ideas with clients in advance of the fourth quarter.

► **Narrow the Focus:** Based on your knowledge of clients, have a few product options in mind that you can pitch right out of the gates. You can always change course if need be, but streamlining the focus from the start can facilitate the sales process.

► **Plan Your Outreach Early:** Have your holiday gift-giving for clients (and employees, if applicable) planned out in advance of the season so you can devote all your energy to sales.



## Action Item

Start contacting top clients about holiday gift initiatives today.

## By the Numbers

**\$48** The average amount companies plan to spend on thank-you gifts for individual clients this holiday season. (ASI)



# 16%

That's how much more companies spent on average for holiday employee rewards (cash or gifts) in 2015 versus 2014. (ASI)

## Step 2

# Suggest a New Year's Gift

Keep clients from getting overlooked in the December gift blitz by orchestrating a uniquely timed promotion.

Help your customers succeed, and you're sure to be a success.

It's a truth George Sagadencky has learned in his 25 years of promotional product sales. Even more importantly, the owner of Minuteman Press Burbank (asi/377893) routinely puts that knowledge to good use by creating unique promotional solutions that help his clients stand out.

It was this kind of creative thinking – along with old-fashioned hustle – that helped Sagadencky earn an approximately \$6,000 holiday season order from a division of U.S. Bank that specializes in commercial lines of credit.

The opportunity began with an in-person cold call. Sagadencky walked in and asked if the U.S. Bank division needed help with business cards – a specialty of his company, which offers both print and promo products. No, was the answer, but Sagadencky had another angle to try: holiday cards. His timing was right, and he secured a sale.

Admittedly, the order added up to a pittance in revenue, but the door was now open. Sagadencky wisely used his “in” to keep the conversation going. His client-focused questions enabled him to learn the bigger dilemma: The commercial lenders needed



high-quality holiday gifts for clients and prospects – and fast. “It was already early December, and they were stressing,” Sagadencky says.

His solution? Forget sending a gift in December. Instead, he told the client, be unique by sending a gift that will arrive the first week of January when recipients return to work. The client liked the unique angle, as well as Sagadencky's suggestion of a gift basket from Godiva. The baskets included a note from U.S. Bank

Personalized to recipients, the notes welcomed end-users back from the holidays and delivered best wishes for an excellent New Year. The baskets reached end-users the Tuesday after New Year's weekend – the day most people were likely to be back at their desks.

“They got a great response,” says Sagadencky. “Many people responded to say thank you. It even helped facilitate their getting a recipient to open up a line of credit with them.”



### BONUS TIP

#### Pitch Holiday Cards

As George Sagadencky's story illustrates, providing holiday cards for corporations and local businesses can be a gateway to promotional product sales with these organizations. “The print business can lead to promo. If they're buying print, they probably need promo too,” says Sagadencky, owner of Minuteman Press Burbank (asi/377893).

If you don't already offer holiday cards, consider partnering with trustworthy vendors who can produce the cards you'll seek to sell.



### By the Numbers

# 1.6 billion

Christmas greeting cards are purchased in the U.S. annually. (Greeting Card Association)

# 50%

of adults buy candy, including chocolate, for the holidays. That makes candy the most popular holiday snack. (NPD)



### Action Item

Identify prospects whose businesses would especially benefit if they sent an early January gift. Then, approach them with the idea.

## Step 3

# Develop One-of-a-Kind Promos

Healthy profit margins, good ROI for clients and buyer loyalty are several desirable results that stem from producing custom holiday gifts.

To succeed in a dog-eat-dog marketplace, Nelson Penalver knows it's essential to stay a step ahead of the competition.

When it comes to holiday season sales in particular, the director at LOI Marketing (asi/255497) has been outpacing competitors by conceiving and delivering custom products for high-end clients with ample spending power.

For this upcoming holiday season, one spirited job Penalver is working on involves producing several thousand custom cellphone chargers for a large health network. Molded into the shape of the client's logo, the chargers will be delivered to doctors, nurses and other staffers around the holidays in an elegant custom gift box. The package will also include a holiday card from the CEO that will reach recipients in a personalized envelope. "When you create unique products competitors can't match, you're much more valuable to your clients," says Penalver. "And when you're valuable, you're in a very good position to keep earning their business."

Of course, the custom charger order didn't simply fall out of the sky. It started with Penalver thinking about his client's



intended recipients. He asked himself: What would be a practical and attractive gift that would make the lives of doctors and nurses easier – something that would be used time and again while conveying that the hospital truly values its staffers? Chargers seemed a logical answer. "The doctors and nurses are running all over the hospital, from one room to another, one floor to another. What happens if their phone is going to die? They don't want to leave it unattended somewhere to charge," says Penalver. "This charger keeps

them connected without disrupting their work."

Penalver gave a similar pitch to the client when he presented a virtual sample of the charger. The idea was well received and the green light given. Pre-production samples soon followed and the chargers are set to arrive from an overseas factory in autumn – one of a number of custom projects Penalver is bringing to fruition. "The right custom products can set you apart, make your client happy, and really give your sales a boost during the holiday season," he says.

## 3 Tips for Executing Winning Custom Orders

► **Know the Audience:** "You have to base the product on the needs of the end-user and the message your client wants to communicate to them," says Nelson Penalver, director at LOI Marketing (asi/255497). "If you don't do that, you're wasting your time and your client's money."

► **Demonstrate the Value:** Custom products require a larger investment from clients. That means you must present compelling reasons that clearly show how the additional expense will pay off handsomely. Explain the positive impact the product you're pitching will have on end-users – how it's ideally suited to meet their wants and needs. Also, share case studies and testimonials that spotlight the ROI your other clients have gained with custom orders.

► **Leave Ample Lead Time:** Custom orders don't happen overnight. Getting a product constructed overseas correctly and shipped stateside for an in-hand date can take several months at minimum, and often more than that.

## Action Item

Identify and partner with trusted U.S.-based suppliers skilled at navigating the custom product creation process with overseas factories. This will likely save you time and headaches, giving you a better chance of the product arriving well-made, accurately branded and on time.

## By the Numbers

**\$44** The average amount companies plan to spend on holiday gifts for each employee this holiday season. (ASI)



Nearly half of all companies reported that

**100%**

of the gifts they gave out during the 2015 holiday season bore their company's logo. (ASI)

## Step 4

# Cater to the C-Suite

Increase holiday revenue by crafting gift solutions for executive end-users.

When it comes to holiday sales, Marty McDonald focuses his efforts at the top.

The president of McDonald Imaging Solutions (asi/522770) devotes his energy to ensuring high-level executives and board members at larger organizations receive quality gifts come December.

McDonald's reasons for primarily pursuing the executive niche in the holiday sales market make good sense. The per-gift budgets are significantly bigger, margins can be better and buyers are looking for insight and creativity. "You know they're going to have a budget and that they're going to be open to suggestions," he says.

On executive gift orders, McDonald typically works through buyers in the marketing departments of client companies. He says it's common for him to source ideas from the ASI Show Chicago in July, and to soon after start contacting buyers with product options. "I try to offer a variety of nicer items that I think will appeal to them," he says, noting that name-brand apparel and executive accessories like padfolios are always well received.

Indeed, a padfolio from Cutter & Buck (asi/47965) was at the center of an approximately \$5,000 order that McDonald



executed for the 60-person board of a large bank during the 2015 season. Beginning in the third quarter, McDonald reached out to the buyer with potential ideas. "You have to get in early to start driving the sale," he says.

Guiding the sales process, McDonald soon arranged a meet-

ing, showing the buyer a sample of the padfolio debossed with the bank's logo. Having the buyer see the item in person and feel it in her hands helped clinch the deal. "It had a very high perceived value," says McDonald. "That high perceived value is essential when the audience is executives."

## 3 Tips for Successful Executive Gifting

► **Keep the Branding Subtle:** Executive end-users tend to favor a more understated look. As such, opt for subtle branding, as Marty McDonald did when he delivered a Nike quarter-zip top that was imprinted in a classy style on the sleeve, rather than blazoned broadly on the left chest. "It's more in line with executive tastes," says the president of McDonald Imaging Solutions (asi/522770).

► **Show Physical Samples:** Given the relatively high cost of the items and the importance of the recipients, it's paramount that buyers have a chance to see and touch the actual products you're pitching. This helps clients feel confident that the item will – or will not – create the desired impression.

► **Pay Attention to Packaging:** Shoddy packaging can make a poor first impression, undercutting the high worth of the gift. Ensure C-level gifts come in packages that match the character of the products they contain.

## By the Numbers

# \$185,850

Average annual salary of CEOs in America.  
(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)



# 238,940

Number of CEOs in America.  
(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

## Action Item

Are you providing executive gifts for all your key clients? If not, contact buyers with the greatest potential spending power and discuss a handful of high-end gifting ideas.

## Step 5

# Plan Promos With These 9 Strategies

Put these tips into practice and you're bound to bolster business.



### KNOW YOUR CLIENT'S BUDGET

Have a handle on what buyers can spend. Without this, you're flying blind, which squanders your time and your client's. So, get a budget range and pitch good-better-best options within that range – and a pinch above it.

### OUTFIT SEASONAL STAFFERS

38% – The average staffing increase at toy and games stores during the holiday season. New employees could require uniforms and nametags, as well as lanyards. Fulfill the need. (*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*)

### MARKET DEALS

When you learn of discounts on frequently purchased holiday items and hot new products, be sure to alert clients. Send an e-flyer highlighting deals to customers. If you have an e-newsletter, prominently feature deal information in it.

### MIND THE MILLENNIALS

More than one in three American workers is part of Generation Y. If your client's end-users include members of this younger set, present product options that will have particular appeal to them. Mobile device accessories and other tech items are often well received. (*Pew Research Center*)

### INCLUDE CALENDARS

\$666 million – That's the total revenue distributors generated from sales of calendars in 2015. The holidays are an opportune time for businesses to send out calendars that will help keep them top-of-mind with customers throughout the year. (*ASI*)

### CONSIDER TRAVEL ITEMS

275 miles – That's the average long-distance trip a person makes during the Christmas season to see family and friends. Suggest products that make the journey easier and more comfortable – like tumblers, travel pillows and travel kits, or even ice scrapers. (*U.S. Department of Transportation*)

### PARTNER WITH NONPROFITS

The holidays are a time for nonprofits to thank donors and dedicated volunteers. Savvy distributors don't let the opportunity pass them by. For instance, PromosOnTime.com ([asi/300918](http://asi/300918)) annually supplies a New York-based nonprofit with gifts for its dedicated volunteers. Items have included everything from 400 fleece vests, to branded chef shirts for the organization's most dedicated do-gooders. The chef shirts tied into the nonprofit's mission, which includes providing food.

### DO FRONT-END DESIGN WORK

Design holiday-themed graphics and messaging for products. Some prospects will appreciate this ready-to-go artwork, which allows them to incorporate their logo onto a product without having to labor through an entire art development process. "People are pressed for time," says Michael Lerner, president of PromosOnTime.com. "If you can offer them a turnkey solution that helps them get their gift-giving done faster, you're doing them a major service."

### PREPARE YOUR WEBSITE

54% of holiday shoppers said that they planned to do some of their 2015 holiday shopping on their smartphones in spare moments throughout the day. It's a trend likely to continue. Have a mobile-friendly website with a special holiday-themed section. (*Google/Ipsos*)

