



Know your customer this Christmas!

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“Make sure you know what your customers want and have success during the proverbial harvest time!”

The Christmas season is eagerly anticipated every year in the business sector. For the trader, it's the proverbial "harvest time"—a boom period during which the astute businessman can reach great heights in sales, provided he understands the consumer's needs and buying habits and manages it with great care.

Tips on sales and sales promotion are plentiful in the literature, but are they applicable in practice? Over the years, I have tried and found the following tips to be practical and useful:

Inventory Management System

The foundation of good sales is an efficient inventory management system. It's entirely impossible to remember how much of a particular product was sold in the past five Christmas seasons.

A good inventory management system should be able to indicate how much of each product was sold in those respective months, especially during peak times, so that the trader can place sufficient stock on the shelves. Out-of-stock inventory as well as surplus stock are equally detrimental to the business.

Product Presentation

The above system makes an enormous contribution to the right product presentation within the business. A good manager or owner must judiciously allocate shelf space to popular products without compromising variety within the enterprise. Make enough room for the good sellers and limit your shelf space for the slow movers.

Product Knowledge

The third golden rule of effective sales is product knowledge. Customers expect sales personnel to inform them meaningfully about the characteristics as well as the benefits of products. For example, the basic features of a certain type of vacuum cleaner may be that it has a 1500-watt motor, features a unique water filtration system, and has been in use for over 100 years.

A good salesperson, however, will place much more emphasis on the benefits that the specific product offers to the customer. The same vacuum cleaner may be the answer for sinus and other allergy sufferers because it can clean carpets, living room sofas, curtains, and mattresses. It may even unclog a drain. Remember, features reassure, but benefits satisfy!

I must warn traders that certain products require specialised knowledge from the salesperson. Therefore, be careful not to use temporary sales personnel over the Christmas season. Someone without proper knowledge may rather undermine the transaction than successfully complete it!

Pricing Policy Customers seek good value for money, so it is important that the company's pricing policy is in place. Obviously, every business must show a healthy profit, but customers should not be exploited at the same time.

Small business entrepreneurs shouldn't even try to compete with the big players on price. There are many other ways to successfully hold your ground, such as providing better service overall, having better product knowledge, and offering specialised services like product repairs and general specialisation.

Niche Market

Every small business owner should strive to create a niche market for his or her business. What makes the business different or better than its competitors? What is unique about the products or services? If the questions can be answered, the entrepreneur knows exactly what message to use in marketing actions.

Make sure you know what your customers want and have success during harvest time!

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