

IS YOUR STORE SALES FIT?

Yes

No

Maybe

LEAD STORY

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MARK OFF THESE TO-DO LISTS — AND IMPROVE YOUR HOLIDAY HAUL



Are you, your store and your staff “sales fit” for the holidays?

We’ve assembled checklists designed to make sure no detail is overlooked as you plan for this crucial selling season. Everything from sprucing up your cases to rallying your staff to concentrate on their jobs — by emulating the hunting patterns of leopards, no less.

Finally, we’ve considered which common holiday hassles are likely to confront you, and we asked the experts for tips on how to resolve or escape them. Consider it a generous holiday helping of retail organization, and our gift to you.

OPERATIONS

1 Steam and clean everything in your cases. At this time of year, you can’t afford to come off looking anything less than your best and brightest.

2 While you’re cleaning, check your tags and reprint any that aren’t legible. People don’t want to wait while you look up basic info like price and carat weight. You might not lose the client you’re with while you’re doing so, but what about the guy behind her?

3 Show the right stuff. Display a range of price points and group similarly priced items in clusters throughout the store, so that the boyfriend who just knows he wants to spend \$500 doesn’t have to keep jumping from case to case. Intersperse big-ticket items that’ll jump out on their own.

4 Bone up on product knowledge. Those DVDs from your vendors collecting dust in the break room? Now’s the time to send them home with your sales staff or watch as a team before you open. Same goes for catalogs and vendor websites.

5 Review your client lists. If you haven’t already started touching base with your best customers, it’s not too late. Assign 10 to 20 leads to each salesperson, including yourself. You don’t have to make long calls, just follow up on



purchases from earlier in the year.

6 ...and notice what they bought. Collecting POS data is great, but all the wish lists in the world aren’t worth a hill of beans if you don’t have the pieces your clients are wishing for in stock. Now may be your last chance to get that bracelet on memo.

7 Double-check the little things, too. Plenty of watch batteries? Enough pens? All your calculators working? Any cases that don’t open easily or

lightbulbs that need replacing? And do you have enough gift wrap? Don’t get caught by bush-league mistakes.

8 Stock up on cleaning supplies. They should be plentiful and accessible. ’Nuff said.

9 Catalogs and other sales material. Find one or two sensible, handy places to keep them and let everybody know where they are — and that it’s imperative that they get put back after each use. Also, if your biggest vendors’ numbers aren’t in your speed dial (or at least on a sticky note next to each phone), they should be.

10 Get seasonal help up to speed. There’s no point in bringing in extra people if they constantly have to ask you or your regular staff for help. Run quick drills with them on products and protocol, including how to handle all standard functions (sales with all forms of payment, printing gift receipts) on your POS.

11 Make your own list. If you haven’t already, walk through your store with a notepad, jotting down any easily fixable problems or inconveniences. Ask your staff to do the same, and hold a meeting to discuss issues that came up last year and possible solutions.

✓ HOLIDAY PREP KIT

As their fearless leader, you're responsible for sending your employees into the season armed and ready to make sales. Kick off the season by giving them each an inexpensive packet of useful items:

- Breath mints
- Cold medicine (the non-drowsy kind) and aspirin
- Fast-food, pizza and coffee-shop gift certificates
- A card of important dates, including when holidays hours begin and end and any events you're holding

- Kleenex (stock some for clients, too)
- A loupe
- Pens and paper
- Those tiny bottles of liquor they serve on flights

(OK, maybe not)



✓ STAFF SPIRIT

Act Like Leopards

Kivi Bernhard, a South African diamond dealer who restarted his business in Pennsylvania on a shoestring budget, developed the philosophy he calls "Leopardology," based on the habits of South African leopards, solitary hunters with "a 76 percent close rate." Three things you can learn from leopards:

1 **The leopard's entire being is focused on what it does.** It is in the marketplace every day with everything it has in order to survive. Take a look at who you are. When you give your client you, the rest is just the details. You are your competitive edge. Do not arrive at work without you. If you sell you, you



will sell a lot of jewelry.

2 **Study competitor predators.** Identify your true competition and study their hunting methodology. Then offer something unique that they don't, won't or can't.

3 **Maximize your possibility for prey retention.** Leopards store prey in trees, but don't try that with your customers. Instead, lure them into plush chairs, mesmerize them with beautiful music and cater to their individual needs. If you know your customer loves chocolates, for example, order a box and have it ready for the close. Kill 'em with thoughtfulness, comfort and holiday cheer.

Try Bingo

Make and display a bingo-card poster and list a different category of item to sell in each square, says Peggy Rainbow, vice president and reigning jewelry-bingo champion of Worthmore Jewelers in Atlanta, GA. Categories can range from something small, such as jewelry cleaner, to big-ticket items, such as diamonds over 1 carat. Sales associates fill in the squares on their own cards as they sell, vying to win a prize for each pattern of squares completed. The first person who fills every square on the card (called a blackout) wins the grand prize. Worthmore has awarded top prizes of a massage chair and a \$1,000 cash prize — both to Rainbow. "The sales staff loves it and every day you can see them looking at their cards and planning their strategy for the day," she says. "It's also a good way to try to have some of that old merchandise sell." The contest runs the entire month of December, whether someone wins the grand prize early or not.

Live on Island Time

When owners do have contests, says consultant Shane Decker, awarding prizes for the largest-ticket sale or most add-on sales of the day, the store hits its goal more often. Owners can let people know that whoever sells the most from Dec. 1 to Dec. 24, will get an extra \$1,000 bonus or a three- or four-day trip to an island or other weekend getaway destination. Or set a team goal. If the seasonal goal is \$500,000 and the team hits above that — say \$560,000 or \$600,000 — the owner will close for two days and take everyone somewhere special. Remember, competition should be friendly, polite and professional.

Empower Your Team

Consultant Rick Segel of Rick Segel & Associates suggests practicing ownership from inception. Include your employees in meetings where management poses a question, such as, "Sales are down, what can we do to increase them?" Let your employees brainstorm the question and then come up with a plan that you all agree to. "You will not believe what happens when they are allowed to take charge of a specific problem. It is an attitude changer."

✓ BODY AND MIND

It's marathon time. Don't fall apart before the finish line.

Fine-Tune Your Anxiety

Medium-level anxiety produces maximum performance. Maximum anxiety or minimum anxiety have the same result: poor performance, says *Men's Health*.

Drink Tea

Working long hours from now until Christmas can destroy your sleep. Poor sleep before and during stressful events reduces immune-system function, ensuring you will be not only sleepless but sick as well. Solution? Starting a week before the holiday rush, drink about 20 ounces of black tea daily. A study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* and reported in *Men's Health* reveals that a black-tea regimen will cause your body to secrete two to four times more interferon, protecting you from infection.

Bounce Back

If despite your marathon tea-chugging efforts you fall victim to influenza, stay calm. Even-tempered people rebound from illness faster than hotheads do, according to an Ohio State University study.

Look Alert

Are your eyes raw and red-rimmed? (Think pinkeye, only permanent.) *Esquire* magazine offers this advice: Take a dollop of Johnson's Baby Shampoo, add a little water, close your eyes, and scrub your eyelids with the lather. Within weeks, the redness should clear up, making you will feel and look more alert. No more tears? No more funky eye-crust either. And no more frightened customers.

Sleep, Smile, Repeat

Sleep more, eat right and go to the gym, Shane Decker advises. Christmas days get long and tiring. Don't fool yourself: If you're tired, the customer can tell; if you act like you don't want to be there, the customer can tell. They want to have people motivated and enthused when they are Christmas shopping.



Look Sharp

What to wear? Men and women will be dressed for optimal success when wearing suits and beautiful shirts or blouses accessorized with plenty of jewelry. Women should dress appropriately and not provocatively, Decker says. "When a man and his wife are coming in to look at dual Christmas gifts, the lady wants her husband's eyes on jewelry and nothing else," he says. "A lady will scan the entire sales floor and pull her husband in the direction of the person she wants waiting on him — and it's going to be the best-dressed person." Female sales associates should have their nails beautifully manicured at Christmas time, and enhanced with red polish or sparkles, so they can model the jewelry to best effect. "Men love to see jewelry worn. They want to know what it's going to look like on their wives."

Buy your staff lunch or treat them with pizza during hectic periods.



Compliment Often

Have a “Compliment Meeting” where every person at the meeting must say something complimentary about another person, Segel says. The rule is you can’t give a compliment to anyone who has already received one. “This is magical because now you are having all of your employees focusing on positive behavior,” he says.

Pull Your Punches

Shane Decker says *all* holiday meetings should be upbeat. “Owners and managers need to start having sales meetings, not sales beatings,” Decker says. “We sell on feelings and emotions. When people get beat up it ruins the mood for the rest of the day and maybe even longer.”

Plan the Super Bowl

Christmas is the Super Bowl of jewelry-store sales. So fight the urge to postpone sales meetings until January because you

are so busy. “When the Super Bowl comes, you don’t scale back,” Shane Decker says. “You have more meetings, you watch more tapes and you become more aggressive. You need to have *more* sales meetings, not fewer.” And you need to have a 30-minute meeting every morning, to review the day before.

Use the Right Words

Simply reading inspiring words such as



Host a meeting specifically to compliment staff.

“strive” can motivate you subconsciously to meet your goals, *Psychological Science* reports. Write emboldening terms on sticky notes, keep them in sight throughout the day and start reaching for the stars, suggests *Self* magazine.

Get Organized

Post holiday work schedules prior to Thanksgiving, suggests Shellie Bill of Premier Consulting. “Your associates have things to do to get ready for the holiday themselves, and will appreciate knowing when they will have free time to get these things accomplished.”

Be Thoughtful

Feed the staff. Have lunches brought in for employees when things get hectic. Engage a nail technician to give your associates manicures, or a massage therapist to treat them to chair massages, Bill says. And always remember to thank all employees for their hard work.

HOLIDAY HASSLES

LEAP THESE COMMON HURDLES WITH EASE

HOLIDAY HASSLE NO. 1 Too Many Customers at Once

First of all, keep in mind that having more customers than salespeople in your store isn’t really a problem. “It happens a lot during the holidays,” says Elva Valentine of Valentine’s Jewelry in Dallas, PA. “Hopefully, it happens a lot.” Exactly. Still, there’s nothing worse than missing a potential sale because you were too busy working on another one. Here are a few tips to ensure you realize all that potential.

Greeters. You don’t necessarily have to hire another salesperson to mitigate the bad effects of a rush. An inexperienced but cheery employee can be your point person, watching the door, directing customers to the appropriate showcases, offering refreshments and even just making conversation. They can also handle simple but time-consuming minor crises like spills or clients’ kids who need to use the bathroom.

Food. It’s a good idea to serve beverages and snacks all year round, but during the holidays, it’s a must. A lot of shoppers will be rushing around themselves — which means they won’t mind a chance to chill out and wander through your store with a cup of joe. Keep paper cups on hand, but serve the coffee in mugs, so that folks can’t just pour and dash; and if you usually brew Folgers, step it up in November and December with a premium brand. On the days you know will be busy, go beyond cookies and crudités and offer sandwiches. And if you’re swamped and a longtime client waiting for help says they’re going to grab lunch and come back, make sure they do by telling them (discreetly, if necessary, so as not to upset other customers) to bring their receipt back so you can pick up the tab.



Prepare to have more customers than you’re used to.

Set the mood. The background music needs to be Christmas themed, with or without lyrics. The scents of cinnamon and cider are powerful shopping triggers at Christmas time. “The more a store is decorated with lights and trees and all the things that are festive, the more it makes them want to stay longer,” says sales trainer Shane Decker. “If they are walking around with a cookie and they want to hang out and browse the cases, they spend more.”

Diversions. Elva Valentine combines a keep-em-in-the-store tactic with another promotion by mentioning to waiting customers that they ought to fill out entry forms for a monthly drawing. She’s also mounting another monitor to show more jewelry-related footage on your screens, either: Running the occasional Christmas movie may glue some feet to your carpet; to stay within the law, you’ll need a public performance license (details are at www.mpaa.org/Public_Performance.asp).

Probably stick to family fare like *Miracle on 34th Street*, as opposed to the admittedly far more awesome *Die Hard*.

Words. “You can’t flat-out leave your customer,” says Randy Wimmer of Wimmer’s Diamonds in Fargo, ND, “but you can certainly say ‘Excuse me for a moment,’ and very few people object to that.” Just acknowledging a waiting client can make all the difference in the world. And if that’s not enough, it’s OK to pique their interest, too, with a line like “I’ve got something really interesting that I think might be just up your alley.” Just be sure you can deliver.

Information. Valentine stocks a bunch of catalogs near her front entrance, an ideal location: Customers know they’re there and can pick one up to page through while they wait, or they can take one with them, which will hopefully result in a return visit. Valentine’s also started using more in-case signs listing prices and similar info, “so that people can shop, or

pre-shop, as opposed to us having to wait on them,” she says. Not that she or her people mind waiting on anyone, but it’s a welcome relief when someone just says, “I’ll take that.”

Chatters. When you start getting slammed, you do need to politely pick up the selling pace, says Decker. “If it’s May and someone hangs around chatting for three hours to buy an anniversary gift, that’s great, but not in December. Just tell them, ‘As you can see we’re slammed, but please come in after the holidays and have a cup of coffee and we’ll talk then.’”

HOLIDAY HASSLE NO. 2 Bad Weather

The irony of the season is that in many places, at exactly the time when most people want to visit your store, it can become the most difficult — or even treacherous — for them to do so. You can’t argue with the weather, but you can alleviate its worst effects.

Snow dates. If you’ve got an event scheduled and you live someplace where you run the risk of snow, ice or heavy rain, Kim Kramer of Marketing Momentum suggests including a “weather date” on your invitations so that your guests will know when to show up if the original event is canceled.

Daytime events. A little snowfall that’s nothing when it’s 10 a.m. and sunny is a lot less fun to drive in than the same precipitation at 8 p.m., so reduce your weather-related risks by scheduling daytime events instead of nighttime soirees. Valentine’s Jewelry, for example, is treating customers to a swanky brunch.

Buddy system. If it looks nasty, make arrangements in advance for vital employees with long commutes to stay close to the store — at your home, with a co-worker, or at a hotel — if necessary. Encourage staffers to use the buddy system, too, and check in with one another when they get home. Do the same for customers.

Shovels. Maintain a good relationship with your snow cleanup service, if you have one, and obtain promises in advance (in writing, if possible) as to how quickly they’ll take care of you if it storms. And make sure you have shovels, boots and other gear of your own, just in case you have to literally take matters into your own hands.



HOLIDAY HASSLE NO. 3 The Competition

The great part about the season is that so many people are shopping. The worst part about the season is that so many people are selling. Take note of the following to shine like the star on top of the tree, instead of being the sap.

Presents. At Wimmer’s Diamonds, they’re known to give their best customers gold-dipped roses from the 24K Rose Co. throughout the year; this year, they’re going with gold-dipped holly leaves and mistletoe to celebrate the Christmas season. “We just send out notes saying ‘We have a free gift waiting for you in our store, and like our appreciation of you, it will last forever,’” Wimmer says. “It’s just something inexpensive we can give to our better customers.”

Parties. Your party can be a quiet affair during store hours or a blowout bash, but check with your chamber of commerce and any other community calendars to be sure you pick a day free from other events — and let those same calendars know when you decide on your date.

Good tidings. We hope you took care of your big media buys back in September or so, but whether you did or not, there’s still more you can do even as late as mid-November. “At that point, it’s a really good time to start asking your reps for remnant advertising space,” says Megan Meinerding, vice president of client services for Fruchtmann Marketing in Toledo, OH, who handles marketing for the American Gem Society. Particularly in this dicey economy, other businesses may have backed out of their own buys, and the print space or airtime can be booked at a discount.

Brotherhood. Meinerding also recommends watching for chances to partner with other merchants for marketing purposes. “Really look for existing opportunities that make sense from a brand standpoint to tie in to somebody else’s promotion,” she says, “even if it’s in a small way. Anything where you don’t have to do a lot of the legwork is a chance to maximize your gains with a minimum investment of time.” And time, of course, is something you won’t have much of until the new year.

Cards. “Everybody gets a Christmas card and everybody gets a thank-you note, whether they spent \$5 or \$5,000,” says Decker. Make it easy: Every night, go through your sales receipts and address a Christmas card to everyone who made a purchase, put a stamp on it, and file it away. About three days before Christmas, mail the whole collection. But make sure it’s a card — not a thank-you note. Mail thank-you notes on or after Jan. 2, because the person receiving the thank you could be the person receiving the gift. Don’t spoil the surprise.

Invite your customers. Before December, salespeople should review their past three Christmases, because customers are creatures of habit. “You have people who come in every year at Christmas time. Send them a special handwritten invitation to come enjoy the store and the Christmas cookies, and say call me if you’d like an appointment,” says Decker. “It’s awesome to give a handwritten note to the people who come in every year. It makes them feel special.”



WEB ALERT

Crunch-Time Training

The American Gem Society offers Custom Online Sales Training to take you and your staff through real-life scenarios while highlighting six critical skills of selling: presence, relating, questioning, listening, positioning and checking. The whole staff can access each module as many times as they'd like for one price through Dec. 31. Information: AmericanGemSociety.org

iTunes U

Gemological Institute of America has partnered with Apple to provide free continuing education online on iTunes U. Current or former GIA students can access digital material that covers topics including gemstone mining and sources, treatments and synthetics and industry trends. With GIA on iTunes U, you use your computer or iPod to download up-to-date course content. Information: www.gia.edu/education

E-mail Etiquette

Although e-mail tends to be informal in style, it is an extension of your store and brand. Be sure all messages to clients are clearly organized and grammatically correct. Write in complete sentences and always check spelling and punctuation. Even when sending a casual note, give it a good once-over, suggests Peggy Post, author of the latest edition of *Emily Post's Etiquette*.

Where Are You?

This is also a good time to ensure your website has been updated to include holiday events, a map and directions to your store, staff bios and contact information for individual associates.

HOLIDAY HASSLE NO. 4 Missed Opportunities

It's true that jewelry stores make the most money during the holidays. But it's also the time of year that more money is lost through missed opportunities. Decker's yule rules for fitness on the sales floor keep customers shopping.

Add it up. "The biggest missed sale at Christmas is the add-on. The average shopper buys 15 gifts and the average jeweler sells one of them. You tell a husband, who just bought a diamond pendant for his wife, that she would love to have the matching studs and the guy goes, 'That's a great idea!' You ask him how old his daughter is. Twelve? Have you bought her her first pair of diamond studs yet? Everybody is saying traffic's down but the average ticket's up and so is the closing ratio. If you don't write up any more sales slips this year over last year, but if 50 percent of your tickets this year have add-ons, then business will be up as much as 30 percent. So show multiple ticket items."

Wealth to burn. Everybody in the store needs to assume that everybody walking in is a millionaire. Fifty percent of customers are undersold.

The wow factor. Everybody at Christmas has got to be wowed with something drop-dead gorgeous. People buy on impulse now more than any other time of the year. So show high-ticket items to everybody before they go.

Sales-floor etiquette. Do not eat your lunch on the sales floor. Customers are going to think they are interrupting you. No cell phones on the sales floor. Salespeople's phones ringing and vibrating on counters is very rude, especially in the holiday season.

Open every day. Owners need to extend their hours, starting about the second week of holiday shopping, to several late nights and Sunday afternoons.

Wrap it up. Hire a temporary employee to wrap gifts. Professional salespeople should be selling, not wrapping.



HOLIDAY HASSLE NO. 5 Challenging Customers

It seems like everyone is shopping this time of year. That's great, but sometimes the onslaught of newcomers can feel overwhelming, leaving you tongue tied or frustrated. Dave Richardson of Richardson Resource Group shares suggestions on how to exercise your eloquence on the sales floor in some common situations.

Internet objection. A customer says he can buy it cheaper on the Internet. Ask him, (in a serious, respectful manner) "Can you tell me what makes it so *cheap*?" Or ask, "Why didn't you buy it if it was so *cheap*?" Then say, "If that is the case, tell me, how can I be of help to you today?" Remember, they've come to your store for a reason."

Guidance. A customer needs guidance. Focus on romance. Ask "What have you surprised her with in the past? What was her reaction? How did you feel?" All you have to do is help him replicate that wonderful moment in his life. What *not* to say: "Thank you for your business." Business is the furthest thing from his mind. It immediately kills the romance. It has him thinking, "Did I get a good deal?" Instead, say, "Thank you for letting me help you select this beautiful bracelet."

Last-ditch close. Make a pros and cons list with the customer. Ask her everything she likes about the piece. And then ask — not what she doesn't like, but "What are your concerns?"