



8 Ways to Make Your Holiday Marketing Shine

Put a smile on shoppers' faces with these high-tech online solutions for every budget. | By Scott Steinberg

'TIS THE SEASON FOR INCREASING SALES, expanding market share and boosting year-end profits. With the bulk of many businesses' revenues earned during the holiday months, and shoppers in a spending mood, there's no better time to double down on custom marketing programs. Thanks to the magic of high-tech, from unique value-adds to creative contests, giveaways and online deals, a variety of novel campaigns can quickly be assembled to match any budget. Looking to give your enterprise the gift of record Q4 growth? The following strategies can help you tie a lovely bow around that balance sheet.

1 SOCIAL MEDIA PROGRAMS – Paid media can be effective, but it's also expensive. Merchants targeting local audiences on shoestring budgets can use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Google+ to attract customers instead. But offering eye-opening incentives including steep discounts, free samples or unique hands-on trials is imperative to prompting viral pass-along. Programs such as two-for-one deals, bonus gifts with purchase and exclusive events ("Holiday fashion show tonight – get a sneak peek at our 2012 collection!") can all drive foot traffic, siphon customers from competitors and aid with lead generation. To ensure beleaguered shoppers don't discount them though, you'll need to employ singularly original or arresting bargains. Splurging on customers using loss leaders (e.g. gift-wrapped dog treats with every grooming) and splashy time-limited promotions ("free gingerbread ice cream today only!") not only helps generate direct prospects. It also allows you to create sampling opportunities, promote to a captive audience, and, while consumers are actively engaged, potentially drive interest in higher-margin goods.



Small business [expert](#) Scott Steinberg is the CEO of strategic consulting firm [TechSavvy Global](#), author of *The Business Expert's Guidebook* series, and host of video series *Business Expert: Small Business Tips, Trends and Advice*. A celebrated [keynote speaker](#), entrepreneur and [analyst](#), he's appeared in over 400+ outlets from *Entertainment Weekly* to *USA Today*, and is a frequent on-air authority for ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and CNN.



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2 AFFILIATE AND REFERRAL MARKETING PROGRAMS – Given word of mouth’s growing influence on today’s household purchasing decisions, it pays to turn fans of your business into Santa’s little helpers. The best way to recruit them: Incentivize conversation by providing eye-catching offers and savings, and compensate those that generate direct leads with exclusive discounts, gifts and cash rewards. Using software tools such as those offered by providers like Extole, DirectTrack and ReferralCandy, you can create customized referral programs for almost any industry. (Refer a pal, get \$20! Click here to send Facebook friends a code for 60% off!) Distributable via social networks, widgets, apps and email, white-label solutions not only offer wide flexibility across devices, platforms and promotions. They also make it easy to track ads from click to purchase, and conscript an army of credible sales associates working on a strictly commission basis.

3 MOBILE AND LOCATION-BASED MARKETING – Over 420 million smartphones will sell in 2011 alone according to IMS Research, many containing built-in GPS devices that actively monitor users’ locations. Letting you speak to customers at the right time and place when they’re in a shopping mood, mobile and location-based marketing services like Geotoko, Placecast and Xtify can potentially help close more holiday deals. Providing users with discounts, giveaways and specials via text message, pop-up alert or email, you can also integrate marketing with services like Foursquare and GoWalla to tie campaigns to specific stores or locations. From unique apps that send notifications even when closed to search engines that serve up special offers based on zip code, choices continue to grow. Letting you reach customers right when they’re weighing their options, location-based services can help you steal a sale right out from under a competitor’s feet.

4 QR CODES – Another handy feature many smartphones and tablets with built-in cameras such as the iPhone and iPad enjoy: The ability to scan Quick Response (QR) codes. These high-tech symbols, which operate similar to retail barcodes, can beam over instant savings or provide access to useful online information. Add them to signs, print ads, business cards and brochures, and customers can quickly access coupons, download menus on-demand or even see how low your prices compare to rivals’. Simple bonuses they offer might include providing free seasonal recipes to go with every dining set, complementary festive music downloads for that new stereo or videos showing products you’re selling in action. Letting you offer everything from suggestions on complementary accessories to go with that scarf to driving directions, potential applications are endless. Just be sure each offers customers meaningful rewards and tie a call-to-action to programs (take our survey to win a beach vacation!) to maximize performance.



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5 DISCOUNTS AND DEALS – With value still paramount for millions of households, many entrepreneurs are increasingly coupling door-busting offers with regular distribution through daily deal services. Providers like Groupon, Living Social, Amazon Local and Google Offers can potentially put savings in front of millions for a slice of each purchase. Letting customers register to receive arresting bargains on spas, restaurants, movie theaters and more via email, all offer opportunities to help holiday programs connect with households trying to stretch every dollar. You can even set minimum purchase quantities required before discounts activate. Likewise, savvy marketers are also leveraging bargain-hunting services like FatWallet, RetailMeNot and DealsPI.us to reach today’s most price-sensitive buyers. Providing discount coupon codes, printable vouchers and unique presents for gift shoppers themselves (free holiday sampler with purchase) can help entice cost-conscious customers back into the fold.

6 CONTESTS AND GIVEAWAYS – The virtual equivalent of dropping a business card in a fishbowl for a free lunch, enticing customers to sign-up for generic online newsletters and email blasts is often just as difficult. To boost conversation rates and motivate holiday audiences, instead offer value-adding content (“one-of-a-kind holiday recipes delivered right to your inbox!”), interactive promotions that put applicants front and center, and more stirring rewards. Wherever possible, invite users to participate by submitting videos, photos, stories and other personal touches (“tell us your worst holiday gift”). Likewise, convert winning submissions into community spotlights, whether by highlighting contributors online, incorporating their submissions into ad campaigns, or making victors featured guests of honor at neighborhood events. Holiday giveaway prizes should also reinforce the promotion’s theme, provide unique experiences, or play to wish-fulfillment. Hint: “Cozy up with a romantic five-course Italian meal with seasonal wine pairing” sounds better than “dinner for two at Alfredo’s.”

7 KEYWORDS AND ONLINE ADVERTISING – According to the Ponemon Institute, a full third of holiday shoppers plan to spend more money online than in-store in 2011, and 37% and 12%, respectively, to make gift-giving purchases via smartphone or tablet. Knowing this, no matter your desired budget or audience, purchasing targeted keywords on popular search engines like Bing and Google can put you in front of prospective buyers right where they’re doing their primary research. Coupled with custom geographic/demographic targeting and personalized scheduling and spend levels, choosing specific keywords and terms can prove a highly effective sales tactic. For maximum impact, use more detailed search terms (e.g. “bike repair shop Dallas” vs. “bike repair”) and less popular phrases. (Placements are sold via silent auction, meaning purchasing lightly-contested terms may offer a better share of voice at lower cost, and more click-throughs.) Inside tip: If you’re feeling more naughty than nice, you can also buy up keywords related to competing products.



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8 CUSTOM CONTENT AND PUBLICATIONS – Resourceful entrepreneurs can also give shoppers the gift of more precious moments to spend with friends and family by providing time-saving hints and advice. Email marketing services ConstantContact, iContact and MadMimi let you send seasonally-themed digital newsletters straight to shoppers’ inboxes for a fraction of the cost of print mailers, and enable content sharing through social networks. Popular service MailChimp even allows gorgeous, customized mailings to be sent free in small quantities, while up-grades allow you to track viewers’ social media profiles and send targeted emails via Facebook, Twitter, Flickr or LinkedIn. Couple with links to bargains, storefronts and online videos (free to upload and host on providers like YouTube, Vimeo and Metacafe, then embed on your own site) to enhance SEO and user engagement. Beyond highlighting your expertise, all can enhance your reach, keep holiday bargains top of mind and help alleviate shoppers’ stress while building brand awareness.



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