

'TIS THE SEASON TO GET SOCIAL

> If online retailers and big-box stores are a challenge to small-business owners year-round, they can be a terror come Christmas, with poinsettias in every Walmart and Home Depot and hostess gifts delivered in hours from Amazon.

And yet for many customers the season — for all its hustle and stress — centers on emotions and loved ones. Sound familiar? Those are two things local florists are built around, too.

Social media marketing can help you connect with your customers during the holiday season on an emotional level that big, national companies can't touch. That's important: According to HubSpot, 81 percent of people say posts from their friends directly influence their purchasing decisions.

Here's how you can tweak your social presence in the buildup to the holiday season for maximum effect.

Make Facebook Ads Timely

I write a lot about Facebook Ads in this column, and for good reason: They're important. If you aren't advertising your posts to current and potential customers, no one is seeing them.

The same ads you run year-round will make an impact for the holidays, but an "offer ad" specifically is a great way to drive trackable traffic to your store while providing a discount to customers. You'll want to start running holiday ads when you begin to post about the holidays on Facebook or when you begin to get holiday items in your store. The easiest way to advertise is simply by boosting/promoting your holiday posts.



MORE TO SEE At Monday Morning Flower and Balloon Co. in Princeton, New Jersey, social posts leading up to the holiday season remind customers of gifts and services beyond "just" flowers and plants.

Promo Everything You Offer

Put your unique selling points (USP) front and center. Remind customers of what you have that the megastores don't. This may be a unique flower selection, additional gifts to go along with their flowers, free delivery or something completely different. Highlight products and services you offer that customers may not know about — festive poinsettias and plants in unexpected shades and textures, home décor or tree decorating services, customized centerpieces and mantelpieces, gourmet gift baskets, etc.

Brainstorm how to best share your USP, whether you choose a text and image post, infographic, video or blog post. Don't forget to feature products in your USP posts.

If you do offer services that customers generally only expect from big-box stores (e.g., free shipping), make that known. According to BigCommerce, 66 percent of online shoppers have decided against an item because of shipping costs.

Create New Twists on Holiday Traditions

Customers find "ordinary" holiday gift and décor items lots of places. Your holiday posts should show how you add unique twists to classic traditions.

Last year in Princeton, New Jersey, for example, Monday Morning Flower and Balloon Co. shared a photo of its "Santa Puppy" bouquet, an adorable design of white carnations arranged to look like a puppy wearing a traditional Santa hat.

Gift baskets that include seasonal or local items that may bring back memories for customers also fall into this

category, as do community partnerships with popular businesses.

Create Buzz with Videos and Events

Few Facebook tools and resources for businesses are as simple and effective as live videos, prerecorded videos and Event pages. These should be in heavy rotation year-round.

Live video gets a higher reach than prerecorded video, so it's a great way to show off products to more people for free. Go live for announcements big and small — new poinsettias are in, or you have the winner of your holiday open house drawing. (For more on how to decide whether to use a recorded video or go live, check out safnow.org/moreonline.)

Event pages serve as invitations, reminders and RSVP counts. They make it easy for customers to keep track of your event and for you to predict turnout. If you advertise your event with Facebook Ads, it will be easier to reach people in your area who are likely to attend.

Humanize the Holidays

People make your business what it is, so feature plenty of photos of yourself, your staff and your families taking part in holiday activities in and out of the store.

Share customer feedback and stories or add albums of your favorite past holiday work. You can also share any holiday press your business has gotten. These posts will subtly drive home the warm and fuzzy point that yours is a business fueled by real people.

Another thing to remember: In the lead-up to the holiday season, reporters often are on the hunt for topical stories about holiday trends and events. Small-business owners who are in the habit of sharing those things stand a better chance of landing free press and positive PR. 🐾

Crystal Vilkaitis, founder of the Social Edge (formerly called Crystal Media), teaches social media to independent retailers and is a featured presenter at SAF events. Social Edge provides Facebook and Instagram ads management and social media content. crystal@socialedge.co



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Tim Huckabee, FloralStrategies, LLC

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- Key elements of a successful encounter with a customer
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Plus listen in as Tim makes mystery shopper calls to real florist shops!



ABCs of Social Media Advertising

Crystal Vilkaitis, Crystal Media

You'll learn:

- Marketing techniques that will save you time and money, and get you seen
- Targeted strategies for the top sites, including Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn
- How to make paid advertising on social media pay off



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