

Maximizing Your Gift Show Trip

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Atlanta Gift Show:

Get hotels a year ahead of time, eat breakfast and start early. Wear comfortable clothes and especially shoes and bring along a roller bag for all your catalogs although there are size restrictions for the roller bags, you can check America's Mart website for those. If you can afford it, bring another person you trust who knows the store and customers.

Have a plan- Go to every gift floor and at least peak in and walk around do a quick run through you never know what you can find either products for your store or display and merchandising ideas. Take pictures of how they merchandise things.

Have a goal to how you are going to get through all the floors. Make appointments if possible with your reps. It saves time and you get one on one time.

When you are ready for lunch either go early or later, otherwise you end up in lines. (Sue) Take advantage of lunch programs, free (usually very good) and a program that you can get something from.

Don't be afraid to try new things, I was afraid at first that customers would be upset that i was adding so many sidelines, pleasantly surprised that they loved it.

Think forward to remember if you are only attending one gift show that you should bring merchandise for all seasons, not just one. You need to have merchandise changing and moving around all year round. Also, don't use one date for all your deliveries, spread it out over a month or so, not only financially but also hard on receivers.

Have credit sheet ready, or use credit cards and don't forget business cards and resale numbers.

Review the America's Mart website for when temporary vendors are going to be there, this is a great source of merchandise from people all over the country who don't have permanent showrooms. These vary from year to year but there are always the same vendors back each year.

This is exhausting work, but sidelines are well worth the trip to Atlanta or whatever other gift shows you attend.

I also frequent stores in Chicago for ideas, look through magazines for trends and Christmas wish lists from store catalogs. In addition, I always tell my staff as they travel to take pictures of items they see in other book stores or gift shops for ideas.

Most importantly once in comes in the door, Merchandising is key.

Items to share:

Kate Spade-stationary, journals, pens/pencils, office supplies, photo albums, coffee mugs, plastic tumblers with straws, boxed cards. available by Lifeguard Press

Living Royal Socks- colorful at many price points, you can find a pair for everyone!

Puzzles, by Ravensburger, NY puzzles, Piatnik

Sally Wizik Wills

Beagle and Wolf Books & Bindery

112 – 3rd St. W., Park Rapids MN 56470

218-237-2665

sally@beagleandwolf.com

Importance of building relationships with the reps

Create a credit sheet

Safeguarding credit cards

Different ways that stores can get ideas for new sidelines

Items to share:

greeting cards, fair trade items, and locally made wooden toys.

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Gift Shows: Prep is the Key

Open-to-Buy, Categories or sections that support sidelines, easy turn, non-seasonal merch mixed with holiday.

Budget - allocating dollars (including shipping) for purchases.

Plan ahead to get in - how will you introduce and promote product (i.e. do they have a Play Day kit, samples, or event program) and how will you exit? (look for online sales restrictions, MSRP, and check mass market competition.)

Always get the display.

Sales rep follow-up or direct account? Look for support structure, rack servicing, and easy returns for damage. Where is product manufactured, and are there safety testing documents available IN THE BOOTH?

ASTRA tips: split orders with other retailers to get better freight and selection. Look for online marketing materials and other collateral from mfr. Test market if you have time - take back 8-

10 items from show (ask for them) and do a focus group. Use social media to post from show to get instant customer feedback. Ask for other accounts in your region and call them (from the show. They won't mind.)

GAMES: Everyone can sell 4 new games/season, and you need one of each open in store. Have a game night for staff. (ask for a rep to run it if you want to.) Key game factors: should be able to explain on the floor in 10 seconds or less... Know reading level of game board and directions vs. recommended age on the box..... Know time of game completion in actual play with 2, 3, 4 people vs. time listed on the box. Offer drawstring bags in your game section (for sale, \$1 - \$5) to put game pieces in without the box. It's an add on sale that makes all the difference.

Look at the show website before you go and check vendors for interest - have them send you catalogs, samples, etc. ahead of time.

TREND ITEMS. Key factors in jumping on a "fad" - must have regional buy in (no point to ordering stuff that's hot until it's local.) Must be easy to ship small quantities (my formula is 24 - 48 - 48 - 48 - 48- 12) Put a sign in your door when new shipments of fad items arrive. Current fads (this was written in mid Sept: Squishies (multiple vendors), Pusheen blind boxes (actually most blind box items), brushable "magic sequin" covered items, Morph and Slime.

Toys

Our big shows are Toy Fair (unnecessary but interesting), ASTRA Marketplace (vital for 4th qtr ordering and GAMES), NY Now (holiday, baby and smaller co's), ABC (which is changing a lot, but interesting for last minute trends at the holidays), and Windy City Gift Show (which I honestly REALLY DISLIKE since it replaces the Mart, but I'm old like that.)

Bigger trend in toy ordering is the sightseeing at shows followed by online wholesale ordering. Also, the whole concept of trends: how do you find out about them and get shipped product to make \$\$ before it's over, and without getting stuck with a lot of stuff? Right now, for example, I have only 6 spinners in stock, but about 600 squishies, and I am cutting the slime orders by 50% every month. I might make it out alive..... and I'm looking for the next trend.

The point of toy sales in a bookstore, in my opinion, is to follow your hot sections. So if you do a ton of baby, you should up your baby products to support that. If you do a ton of middle grade, you should have the trend items. If you do a lot of YA, well then, you're just cool.... but you should also know what sells to preteens and have sidelines for mommies. Toys are for EVERY age. If you don't have 4 new games to sell at the holidays, and they are not out on demo.... you're leaving money on the table.

Items to share:

Indiana Onesie (infant apparel)

Haba Little Friends

ZIPES and Linkt kits from Neat-Oh

NPW gift line for tweens

Sue Boucher

Cottage Book Shop

5989 Lake St

Glen Arbor, MI 49636

Plan some ideas of what you are looking for before you go but allow for new ideas

Work the gift show from the top floor down, most people start at the bottom and go up

Take advantage of lunch programs, they are free (and usually very good) and they provide great information from people in the gift industry i.e. making a gift basket

Items to share:

Custom local t-shirts

Plus-plus toys

Blue Q socks