

## For marketers the holidays always come early \*

By Mark Kolier, president, CGSM

Summer is my favorite season. Vacations, long days and warm nights always make me happy, and the subsequent memories sustain me (and my fellow Northeasterners) during the cold and dark winters. It is so tempting to turn off not only the BlackBerry but your attention to marketing, with the idea that nobody does anything until after Labor Day, anyway. While there is some benefit to that notion, turning off and tuning out can also put your business on the fast track to a disappointing holiday season. Here are a few things to keep in mind while contemplating those (in the words of the great Nat King Cole) lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer:

1. In the retail sector, nearly 20% of all sales take place during the holiday season, according to the National Retail Federation (NRF). This year the season runs from Nov. 23 through Dec. 26.
2. Online spending is increasing at an accelerated pace every year. During the first 56 days of the 2006 holiday season, total online retail spending reached \$23.11 billion, marking a 26% increase versus the corresponding days in 2005, according to ComScore.
3. My own observations of online sales shows that these customers are driven by “discounts and savings,” with “saving time” and “free shipping” coming in a close second and third.

So being ready for the holiday season is important—anyone can understand that. But being able to hit the ground running when everyone is back from vacation after Labor Day requires advanced planning. In the catalog world, holiday catalogs will begin to pile up in your mailbox in early October. You can be sure that marketers were discussing those plans well before Memorial Day.

If you have not made any significant plans to market your product or services for the upcoming holiday season, here are several things you can do to be ready for action:

- Optimize your Web site. SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is the most effective way to market your product or service on the Internet. SEO inspires organic search, which is the way your listing can reach the first page of the big search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Educate yourself if you are not aware. Paid search (pay-per-click) and sponsored listings are not nearly as effective.
- Re-evaluate your prospect lists. Your business is constantly facing new challenges and changes in the marketplace that you must manage. It's unlikely that every top prospect from even a year or two ago will remain a top prospect. New prospects should emerge and older less likely ones will be downgraded in your priority list.
- Review your company marketing material and marketing messaging. Are they up-to-date and easy to understand and distribute? Do they say what your company really does and can do for your prospects and customers?
- Clean up your direct mail and e-mail marketing lists. Postage went up May 14 and is expected to increase again in 2008. So it makes sense to consider who is getting your physical mailings. The bottom 10% of your customer database holds that distinction for good reason. Mail them less frequently, send them e-mail instead or cut some of them altogether. Take your postal savings and invest it in the top 10% of your customer database.
- Think about how you can use new media to promote your business. Ask yourself how a number of new marketing channels—mobile marketing (cell phone/PDA), social marketing (Facebook.com and MySpace.com) and blogging, product or business placement in places like Second Life—can help your business reach new customers.

If you do even some of the things noted above your business will be in a much better position for the holidays and beyond and there will still be plenty of time to dig your toes in the sand, read the latest John Grisham and bask in the sunshine.

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