

Offer a Personal Book-Shopper Service

By Stephanie Bond

The great thing about books and book accessories is that they make great gifts for everyone on every person's shopping list. This holiday season, consider offering a personal shopper service—a person gives you their shopping list with a few details about the recipient's age, likes, and dislikes, along with a price range, and you select a gift, 2-3 gift items for the giver to choose from, or even a customized gift basket. How can you implement the program?

- Establish the parameters of the service and what features you will offer. How much notice do you need—an hour? A few hours? (This is especially important if the occasion has slipped the gift-giver's mind!) Will you gift wrap? Include a gift card? Deliver? Accept returns on the item(s)?
- Determine your target audience: Existing walk-in customers? Customers who shop in stores around yours? Executives? Homemakers? Party planners? Shoppers who are housebound?
- Consider setting up a station within the store to publicize your personal shopper service. Print flyers to advertise your new service, stressing the practicality for holidays or any gift-giving occasion, especially if a person has to buy several gifts for one occasion (bachelor party? sales conference?).
- Advertise the service to customers by stuffing flyers in shopping bags and by talking it up whenever possible. Refrigerator magnets are great for reminders when people are in a hurry!
- Advertise to executives (and their assistants) by distributing flyers in person to office buildings nearby, or through direct mail. Stress the advantages: time savings and high quality. Also, since you're familiar with the discounts and sales items in the store, you can save the giver money by taking advantage of special offers.
- Consider developing a website or page on your website to detail the program and take on-line orders. By offering the personal book-shopper service on-line, you also increase your opportunities to market the program.

If you develop and advertise a personal book-shopper service, it can provide a nice source of incremental income to your store all year long. Depending on your market, the sales potential of the program might even be worth hiring a dedicated employee to oversee and implement the program. When it comes to offering a personal touch, be willing to think outside the box (of your four walls)! ~**SBond**

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