

Is Christmas Selling Still Important?

Sometime between now and December 25, pros will be trying to turn merchandising ideas of Christmas Past into the cash of Christmas Present.

The Christmas selling season is the highlight of the year in some shops, while others continue to report they are losing faith in its high possibilities. Whatever the outlook, a brisk Christmas business seems to go hand in hand with a shop's strong merchandising effort. The greater the effort, the greater the participation of members in shopping the pro shop for Christmas.

In the past month GOLFDOM has been asking pros about their Christmas business, and despite many gloomy forecasts for the economy as a whole, the season looks good for this industry. A number of shops reported that they expect to handle 25 percent of their 1974 business through the holiday season.

GOLFDOM's sampling was concerned with attitudes and ideas. While a few pro shops report they are trying to ease up on merchandising efforts in the holiday selling season, there are still notable exceptions.

Cincinnati's Kenwood Country Club, under the direction of Bob Foppe, makes the yuletide pay off at the cash register with an extended effort in Christmas marketing.

Of course, Foppe uses the usual stand by promotional items such as club mailers, reminding customers that his shop is open for the season and what items are available, but he also uses telephone contact to give prospective buyers advice on purchasing.

Foppe's plan of attack begins in September when he sends lists to members who bought personalized golf balls last Christmas. Then, they have an opportunity to buy them again. For Kenwood and many other clubs personalized balls still are the leading Christmas selling item and in

turn stimulate purchasing of more expensive merchandise.

One interesting sidelight to Foppe's September promotion is his staff's contact with local business firms to use Kenwood's shop as the answer to buying Christmas gifts for their employees. For example, one firm bought 100 varied items for its workers. Foppe spotlighted golf umbrellas, suit bags and duffels in the sale of items, each gift ranging between \$20 to \$25. "In this way, we become a purchasing agent or manufacturer's rep for the companies and generate added buying," he said.

Christmas is always a high impulse buying time for customers and Kenwood is no different in this regard. Foppe says an average Christmas purchase in his shop is \$25.

In the traditional Christmas mailing to customers, Foppe always adds envelope stuffers supplied by manufacturers to expand purchasing thoughts of consumers. At the same time this expands product knowledge of his members. Foppe highlights those companies which offer the most available discounts, including some which extend to April.

The ability to help the customer is more critical at Christmas than ever before, thus service before and after the sale should be re-emphasized. The reasoning is clear. A bad sale at Christmas can influence a member's purchasing rate for the rest of the year.

Most shops have a standing rule that Christmas exchanges are always permitted. Allowing a member to exchange clubs which were a gift is a smart business decision.

Besides the stable items of the industry, shops also offer softgood lines in various colors and styles. Some clubs emphasize reds and greens during the Christmas season. This kind of merchandising is also functional and offers added decoration to the store, especially if Christmas decorating has already been done.

Along with seasonal softgoods, other items could be featured. Overstock of fall goods could be reduced for clearance, while new spring lines can give customers a look at coming fashions. Along with the golf styles, resort clothing could also be displayed for members planning trips to warmer climates during the winter.

In addition to extended hours for convenient shopping plus mailing and telephones promotion, shops can also use other ways to get people out to the club during the Christmas shopping days. Open houses are popular and a small informal gathering in the shop with refreshments is always good public relations. Some shops also offer door prizes such as television sets, hopefully to bring more members through the door.

For many years it has been popular for pros to check golf equipment in storage to look for Christmas gift suggestions. A new bag may be needed, or headcovers and umbrellas. Club repair, replacements, new grips for woods and irons and refinishing are all gift suggestions a pro can supply.

These and many other services can be offered during the selling season, but there are other ways to make members aware of them. For instance, some public courses have advertised to get their selling points across.

Clubs in smaller communities could take advantage of advertising time during broadcasts of local sporting events on radio.

Early in the season shops might list all the articles purchased by a family during the preceding year. This list, often included in the mail pros send to members, can help buyers evaluate gift possibilities.

Gift certificates, of course, are always popular. Several shops offer their members \$2 discounts on purchases of over \$10, if the certificate is used before New Year's Day. Free gift wrapping is another added service. □