



Marking (and Marketing for) an Occasion

By Melissa Kvidahl

Break out the party hats! Highlighting a store's birthday is one way to appeal to everyone, regardless of personal interests or religious sensitivities.

Merchandising columns in *Vitamin Retailer* often centralize around a certain holiday or event; Thanksgiving, Super Bowl, winter holidays like Christmas and Hanukkah, or even back-to-school themes all offer retailers an opportunity to reach out to customers and help them with a certain time in their lives. But not all shoppers celebrate these milestones. Something that anyone can celebrate, on the other hand, is a store's anniversary.

Throw a Birthday Party!

Retailers agreed that one way to create excitement in a store is by throwing an anniversary celebration. And this celebration can be as large or as small as decided by the store.

John Pittari, owner of Woodbury, CT-based New Morning Natural and Organic, began celebrating the store's yearly birthday but then, as he said, "We dropped the 'B' and now it's just an Earth Day celebration!"

New Morning's expansive Earth Day/birthday celebration features a large food tent where manufacturers and representatives can distribute product samples; a wellness tent featuring supplements and health and beauty products, in addition to local practitioners, naturopaths, nutritionists and chiropractors; herb walks and children's activities; and local non-governmental organizations and farmers.

During the celebration, Pittari promotes products from local (within a 100 mile radius) or regional (a 300 mile radius) manufacturers. Not every store needs to follow this formula, but retailers would be wise to take Pittari's advice when it comes to an anniversary celebration: promote products and groups that reflect the store's values and consumer interest will follow.

"We find that for the next several weeks, we have significant lift of anything that is sampled at our event," he said, explaining that the store will place these items on sale as an extended promotion. "I am always touched by how customers stop me and they say they had a great time at the event and 'Look at my basket—here's five items I never would have bought.'"

Outside of its Earth Day celebration, New Morning also celebrated its silver anniversary in the store. Pittari's first tip

to fellow retailers was to choose a time to celebrate that makes sense—it doesn't always have to be in the same month the store opened. "It's kind of fungible," he said. "If your anniversary is August 1, maybe that's not the best time to do it unless you're in a summer resort area. If we were to do something in August, we might as well not do it because most of our clientele is away on vacation."

For its silver anniversary, New Morning added chrome tape to all its signage, and silver ribbons around the store. "We used it for the whole month. When you're consistent like that, people notice it," explained Pittari. "Then, to make the actual weekend of our anniversary special, we did something extra. We always like to have a significant prize. This past year we gave away \$500 worth of groceries."

Country Nutrition, located in Decatur, IL, recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. On March 6, 2010, the store hosted an open house, which featured old photos of 20 years of service that customers signed as a guest book, over 20 baskets for drawings (put together with products provided by vendors), a cupcake tower, balloons, bright window signs and over 200 bags of free merchandise (also courtesy of the store's vendors). That day, customers enjoyed 20 percent off any supplement in the store, while select supplements were on sale at 20 percent off for the entire month.

Start Small

For stores that might not have the current resources to host an elaborate event, simple promotions might be a

Navigating Monthly Promotions

One tactic used by many retailers to bring customers into the store is highlighting specific products based on a national awareness month. And since so many awareness months focus on health, the natural product retailer is met with a calendar of merchandising opportunities.

But there are differing opinions on which months, and how often, a retailer should spotlight.

"I feel retailers should work with the awareness activities each and every month," said Tree of Life's Sosebee. "This will give a needed excitement of provid-

ing value for customers with quality products, low prices and education."

Lotus Light's Krinsky agreed that having a special focus in the store that changes monthly with new signage and giveaways, demos, events and promotions is a great way to keep interest high among shoppers.

Country Nutrition utilizes these months and coordinates its e-newsletter, articles, bag stuffers, signs, displays, specials, demos and samples to apply. "Our goal is getting as much information as possible into our customers' hands," said Debi Nash, the store's manager.

"I think using national awareness months helps some, and I think retailers should pick and choose what works best for them."

New Morning's Pittari has a different take, and while he does utilize these awareness months, he also warns retailers of a risk: "You have to watch out for buyer's fatigue if you're always shouting at the top of your lungs. We aim for once per quarter when it comes to this," he said. "You want these promotions to actually be the high note or the highlight, and you can't highlight everything. What we want to do is pick things that resonate with our core values."

good starting point. Joe Sosebee, retail services manager at Tree of Life (a KeHE Company, Romeoville, IL), suggested that retailers choose products that are seasonally appropriate to the anniversary month. "I believe the No. 1 problem I see in stores is retailers not knowing what and how to promote products each month," he said. "Here are some questions to ask yourself: What's fresh and hot out in the marketplace? What can I promote and sell a lot of? What are the demographic profiles of my location? What is the time of year we will be celebrating the event?"

"Part of the trick is to feature items that are seasonally appropriate for whenever the store anniversary or birthday is occurring," agreed Santosh Krinsky, president of Lotus Light Natural Body Care (Silver Lake, WI).

Sosebee explained that, for example, if the anniversary is in May, a

retailer might consider choosing some products around a Mother's Day theme—skin care products, shampoos and conditioners, scented bath and shower gels, loofah sponges, facial masks, aromatherapy, natural bath salts and oils make sense. "If it's an event right before summer, weight loss products are good," he added. "And you can generally promote a multivitamin for any time event."

"If a retailer has a private label brand, then these should be the first products promoted," suggested Guy Devin, PhD, national science educator at Source Naturals (Scotts Valley, CA). "It builds their brand within the retailer's respective community."

In the end, though, Pittari offered words of advice for his fellow natural product retailers: don't be afraid to start small and aim high. "When we first started, we had a little 20 x 30 tent and it just took off," he said. "You build on your successes and correct what needs to be corrected, and year after year you continually work on it. That's how to build a strong event, and we've learned that." **VR**

i For More Information:

- Lotus Light Natural Body Care, (800) 548-3824
- Source Naturals, (800) 815-2333
- Tree of Life, (800) 260-2424



New Morning's Earth Day/birthday celebration is a yearly success.