

Merry Merchandising

Smart merchandising will ensure that both jingle bells and register bells will ring this holiday season.

By Melissa Kvidahl

Though shoppers may just be putting away the last of their Halloween decorations and costumes, the winter holiday season is just around the corner. And unlike simple winter merchandising, holiday merchandising offers retailers a chance to appeal to people's traditions and customs, making for a more personal experience. But with so many different holidays happening all at once, merchandising during this time can feel like a whirlwind.

"There are so many different holidays during the November and December timeframe, and what ties them all together is the food," said Stephanie Robbins, director of marketing at Pamela's Products (Ukiah, CA). "There are very few celebrations that do not include food." According to Robbins, what this means is that shoppers are looking for not only their run of the mill staples, but also specialty items to make their celebrations unique.

A Holiday Display

The holiday season generally brings about two main attractions: gift giving and festive meals. Organic retailers can compete with big box stores and supermarkets by offering quality items in these categories without breaking the bank.



Gingerbread men made with Pamela's Products Making Mix

"Shoppers are looking for organic products that are festive, delicious and affordable," agreed Katrina Frey, director of sales at Frey Vineyards, Ltd. (Redwood Valley, CA). "Wine communicates celebration and fine dining." Frey suggested pairing red wines like Cabernet Sauvignon with chocolate in a display; or perhaps showing a Frey organic wine with an organic fair trade chocolate bar. "Frey wines are perfect for a holiday display," she said. "Wine is a welcome addition to any gathering of friends and family."

In addition, the holidays also mean, for many, spending time with family. But when dealing with a special needs diet, sometimes traveling and eating are not the easiest combination. Pamela's Products offers a number of gluten-free holiday treats like Pecan Shortbread and Simplebites Ginger Snapz Mini Cookies, in addition to brownie, muffin, cornbread and bread mixes. For those traveling for the holidays, the company offers single-serving packs of two of its most popular baking mixes. "The Single-Serve Baking & Pancake Mix offers a small, personal stack of pancakes for the holiday traveler," said Robbins. "With just an egg, oil and a hot griddle, the holiday traveler can enjoy their favorite Pamela's gluten-free pancakes away from home. It's very exciting for those with special needs or those who simply desire their favorite pancakes."

No one needs to be left out with Pamela's Chocolate Brownie Mix in a single-serving pack, which produces a quick treat with Instant Gratification Brownie, requiring just water, oil and a quick round in the microwave. "These are perfect for hosts as well," Robbins

added. "Offer your arrived houseguests a 'warm-from-the-oven' treat."

"During this time of the year, more than any other, when people have less control over the food served to them, it's helpful for both the diner and the chef to know the alternative

options available," she continued. These gluten-free mixes and packaged goods can make sense in any holiday display, but Robbins suggested pairing them with baking ingredients for a themed display. "Any time a retailer can put a baking vision together in one display, so that the customer can see the possibilities, they're going to have success," she said.

"Think of rolling pins for pies, pans, shelf stable milk such as coconut milk, almond milk or soy milk, recipe cards and pamphlets, etc. Consumers will be shopping for their menus and need to have options."

In the season of giving, Stephanie Volo, president of Planet Dog (Portland, ME), stressed that holiday shoppers tend to extend their gift-giving mentality to the products that they choose. "We believe that holiday shoppers are looking to purchase products that are a value as well as values-based, meaning spending their money appropriately on a product that gives back either to their community or to mother earth," she explained, noting that shoppers today will ask what products are made of, where they are



Seasonal Planet Dog Toys





the Snowball, the Mint, the Glow for Good Ball, a Squeaky Gingerbread Buddy and Naughty or Nice Lil Buds. Any of these options would look great in a 'giving back' or holiday themed display.

for the holiday itself.

For example, Robbins said that retailers can create a display expounding the joys of baking, serving and enjoying pie. This way, retailers can appeal to those celebrating Christmas by implying the holiday without explicitly donning green and red or putting up a Christmas tree. The retailer then offers inclusion to all consumers, even those who do not celebrate but who might want to bake a pie in the winter.

"Food shopping during this time of year has the potential to be creative and more enjoyable than every day grocery shopping," Robbins concluded. "Capturing this spirit is important. When your customers can leave your store feeling good, having had an enjoyable shopping experience and having saved money, they're going to come back, they're going to tell their friends and that's going to return this investment to the retailer." 🍎

A Season of Sensitivity

There's no doubt that many shoppers in December will be looking for holiday food, drink and gifts. But retailers are wise to keep in mind that not everyone celebrates a winter holiday. To maintain sensitivity, Robbins suggested that instead of considering a holiday-specific display, to create a food-specific theme. "The question of sensitivity is such an important question because there are so many different holidays during this time of year, and many who do not celebrate at all," she said, noting that retailers can create excitement and energy for different foods, rather than

made and how they are made. "Consumers today are much more savvy than they have been in years. The natural products retailer, or retailer that has a focused area of natural products, will definitely do well this holiday."

Planet Dog gives back through its Planet Dog Foundation; two percent of all sales of the company's products go toward the funding of training, support and placement of dogs working to help people in need. For shoppers looking to give a themed holiday gift to a furrier member of the family, the company offers Orbee-Tuff® Bulb and Lil Bulb,

For More Information:

- Frey Vineyards, Ltd., (800) 760-3739
- Pamela's Products, (707) 462-6605
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