

Leveraging the holidays through PR: Five top tips

By Kittima Sethi

■ WHEN it comes to taking advantage of the festive season, Bangkok's shopping centers don't mess around. Christmas trees and decorations spring up in mid-November, and promotions flow faster than snow on a mountain top. Just as stores and companies plan their promotions early, if you get a head start on your public relations strategy you too can expect to reap rich awards. With good planning, you can expect increased sales, more customers and more opportunities to grow your business. Here are some PR tips on how you can leverage the holiday season to keep your business busy while you simultaneously build customer loyalty.

1. Create a calendar

We are fortunate that, in Thailand, the holiday season not only includes western celebrations such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and New Years, but also other international and local celebrations like Chinese New Year, Songkran, Valentine's Day, Mother's and Father's Day celebrations and many more. Create a calendar of these events so you can plan for seasonal campaigns. You'll be surprised how full your calendar will look, but don't worry. You have the luxury of selecting the ones you want to implement. This will allow you ample time to plan ahead and avoid any last minute rushes. Also keep in mind that most magazines plan their issues way ahead. Some require a 45-60 days lead time, so the earlier you send information to them, the higher your chances of getting coverage.

2. Pitch stories to media

The end-of-the year is usually the most hectic time for media as they are racing with deadlines to close their issues before the holidays. This period is a "pitching goldmine" as they are usually hungry for content. Reach out to publications to feature your products

or services, or offer to provide holiday-related articles. These could include gift-buying tips, tips on keeping fit and eating healthy during the holiday season, new recipes, holiday ideas, or even sharing your company's CSR or other charitable contributions. If you are in the insurance or banking industry, for instance, you could contribute stories on smart saving tips and advice. The same applies for other holidays as well. Try to find a story angle to tie in with your product and services. Do not ignore online media as most publications have an online version. Pitch your content right, and you could enjoy great coverage and publicity.



3. Embrace social media and touch base with your customers

During this time of the year when most people are juggling between work, family, parties and holiday commitments, they are looking for the most efficient and convenient way to shop for gifts. Online shopping has grown tremendously over the years to meet this need. Make sure your website is user-friendly and easy to navigate to allow potential customers to find your business quickly and make purchases.

Promote your holiday campaigns and special offers on your homepage so they are easy to locate. Integrate this across

all your existing social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Chat apps like Viber, LINE, and WeChat are also other platforms that can be used. You can also schedule your newsletters using services such as Hootsuite, Wildfire, and Shoutlet.

4. Personalize and customize the experience

Making your customers feel special with a personalized service can earn you brownie points. Add a column to your customer database that includes your regular customer's preferences. During the holiday season, or on your customers' birthdays, you can then send offers or gifts (one credit card company in Thailand, for example, treats its clients on their birthdays with gifts based on their spending habits and hobbies) based on their preferences. This helps build customer loyalty.

5. Prepare your collaterals early

Once your calendar is planned and you have determined the special offers you will be giving out during each month or holidays, you may have some posters, flyers and coupons to give away. Get in touch with local printers during the off season to get better deals, avoid the holiday rush and get your message out there before your competitors do! Thai New Year (Songkran) in April is another huge celebration. Order giveaways such as waterproof phone pouches or floral shirts now so that they're ready for March.

So what are you waiting for? Like everything else, a little planning goes a long way. If you need help in implementing some of these ideas we're here to help year-round and to make your business a success!

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