

# Five Good Reasons Retailers Should Host In-Store Events

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We all know the largest threat to brick-and-mortar stores is online retail. We also know that an in-person experience can give consumers quite a few things that an online space cannot.

Providing your customers with a sensory experience is what keeps them engaged and coming back for more. The Internet simply can't provide the ability to touch, smell, or taste a product. So how do you push or expand this sensory experience your store *does* provide? In addition to attention-getting displays throughout your store that get customers to pick up and try on the products, we suggest you rethink in-store events. They can be a great way to get customers into your store, and a fun way to keep them there for a while. And when you think out of the box and start offering more unique events that truly engage and amaze, they can lead to a deeper and more meaningful brand connection, help spread your goodwill, and ultimately get customers talking, visiting, and buying more often.

## Try these on for size:

**Beauty.** Show shoppers just how good their feet can look in your footwear by pairing up with a local beauty salon and offering pedicures to customers trying on sandals. Consider bringing in a specialist in varicose veins. Summer is a time many women dread because their leg veins become visible to others when they wear shorts and skirts and no stockings; finding out how to treat the condition, and what shoes might ease it, would be useful. During prom season, invite a seamstress to come in and alter dresses to the perfect length to accompany the heels your teen shoppers have chosen for the special night. Have a well-known local fashion consultant in as well – she can talk about accessorizing, and she can also talk about how to walk in high heels. Girls want to learn, and mothers are not always the best teachers.

**Health.** Bring in a reflexologist to teach your customers how to massage their own feet and explain how feet affect overall health. Invite a chiropractor to come in and talk about the importance of good posture, and how good shoes and shoe supports can help achieve and maintain it. Of course, a local podiatrist should be on the invitation list as well, to answer questions about foot issues in general. A panel of all three could bring in quite the crowd. Do you have a big athletic customer base? Bring in a local chef a week before a big local marathon is scheduled. He/she can discuss eating habits

and foods that are especially helpful before a race; the chef can also demonstrate how to make delicious protein bars and smoothies. A month before a major race, as publicity for it begins to build, invite a respected local athlete to come in and talk about how to train for a marathon.

**Helping Out.** When businesses show they care about more than the bottom line, they increase consumers' positive perceptions of their companies. Join with a local charity to stage a "Walk a Mile in Their Shoes" event, where customers start out at your store, then walk a mile before returning to the store, where they donate the shoes they wore to your partner charity, which in turn will distribute them to community residents



Customers are excited at opportunities to hear an expert or celebrity speak.

## Use a Preparation Checklist

Preparing for an in-store event isn't necessarily rocket science, but having a checklist is helpful. Following is a general outline; it can easily be adapted for different types of events.

### **Eight-ten weeks before:**

Gather your staff for a brainstorming session to generate event ideas. After you make a list of the "first-to-come-to-mind" in-store event possibilities, start pushing the creative envelope and see what else comes to mind. Be sure to be relevant to the wants and needs of your customers. Once you decide what you'll do, appoint one person on staff to be in charge of all things event-related and to make sure everything runs smoothly throughout the planning process.

### **Seven weeks before:**

Select the date and time, keeping in mind what will make the event the most convenient for your customers. Plan and order any food, drink, decorations, coupons or other materials needed to throw a memorable event. Make arrangements as needed with those people or companies working with you to make the event possible.

### **Six weeks before:**

Promote the event. Place flyers in bags when customers make a purchase, advertise in local news outlets, and generate hype on social media. To create additional incentive, offer a special gift to the first 20 attendees.

### **Four weeks before:**

Schedule employees to work during the event. Be sure to

have enough staff on hand that the event will be executed as flawlessly as possible. For a first-time event, over-scheduling is better than under-scheduling. If you end up not needing all hands on deck, you can always send someone home.

### **One week before:**

Train your staff on their roles/duties. Double check that you have everything you need, i.e., enough food, décor, music playlist, special gifts and packaging. Since people love to take and send photographs on their smart phones, ensure that participants will take photos by giving them a backdrop. A decorated "statement wall" (bonus point if there are photo booth props) is a perfect site for a photo-op. Make poster board banners featuring a hash tag about your event. You could even have little cards printed with your social media handles to hand out to attendees.

### **The day of:**

Enjoy making meaningful connections with your customers! Have fun, remain upbeat throughout the day, be genuine, promote your company, and take lots of photos.

### **The day after:**

Post photos on social media, and thank attendees for supporting your event. Keep a record of who attended, what went well and what didn't. Determine what could be done differently next year if you choose to repeat the event. Thank all staff members for their help. You'll thank yourself the next time you decide to wow your customers with an in-store event.

in need. If your location isn't conducive to a mile-long walk, make it a "Walk a

participants a coupon for a purchase discount on a new pair of shoes, or let them know

to set a time frame on the discount, or state that when it is used, you'll donate a fixed amount to the charity or that you'll match customer donations up to a predetermined amount. Throughout the Walk/discount period, post the current total raised on social media and encourage shoppers to stop by to increase the amount.

**Accessories.** Host an "Accessories Swap," where members of the community bring gently-used jewelry, handbags or scarves in to trade. Participants just might be inspired to couple one of their finds with the perfect pair of new shoes. Have a scarf expert come in to

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Block" event, taking customers around the block or even multiple times around the store parking lot. Then give partici-

that you will give a percentage of that day's sales to the charity as well. If you go the coupon route, it's probably wise

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show women the many ways to tie and wear a scarf. Hayden Harnett, an accessories retailer, held an event where customers could get their leather bags inked with customized “tattoos” by a local tattoo artist. Invite professional shoe shiners in, not only to provide shoeshine services, but to talk about how to care for different kinds of shoes. Offer shoe-care packages at a discounted price. Shoe care events are especially popular around the holidays.

**Hospitality.** Throw a “local” party! Find a *unique-to-the-community* reason to celebrate, and team up with popular local groups/businesses to salute it. The

reason might be historical – say, Founder’s Day/Settlement Day, or the date the community’s first school opened – or current – such as school teams finishing with winning seasons. Maybe you can ask customers what they love most about the community, and find your local theme there. You’ll be amazed how many folks will attend due to the multiple streams of promotion via the participants. There are many ways to make an event feel festive. Invite a local trend-setting chef, a popular music group, a cool DJ or radio talk show host. Create a tailgating atmosphere, with grills outside. Sponsor a wine-tasting. Offer snacks using locally sourced ingredients. Bring in a student *a capella* group to sing. Set a budget for your part of the party, invite groups and businesses to

co-sponsor, and start planning. People enjoy celebrating and it’s a great way to engage all the senses – plus, the run-up to the actual event will bring customers in, to ask questions, offer ideas, and anticipate while they shop.

In-store events are ways to show your customers how much you value them. And when the event creates an emotional appeal, offers something free “just because,” and/or makes a customer feel like a special VIP, it helps strengthen your brand and your relationship with each customer involved. ■

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