

WHAT'S NEXT

**The Future of Hospital
Gift Shops**

How To Compete In A Cyber Shopping World

We all know that retail is changing. More and more people are turning away from brick and mortar stores in favor of shopping from home. You can purchase literally anything online these days. You don't even have to get dressed to shop! What can we do to compete with cyber retail?

According to google there are over 651 million active users on Facebook alone and more than 250 million access it through mobile devices. There are 900 million objects. These include pages, groups, events and community pages. Social media is not just for millennials.

95% of Americans own a cell phone.

77% own a smart phone and those smart phone owners are

94% are age 18-29

89% are age 30-49

73% are age 50-64

46% are 65 and over

Never underestimate the power of social media.

Use social media to your advantage. What a great way to get the word out about your unique shop!

We must know who our customers are and what they want.

Hospital gift shops have a **captive audience**. The majority of our customers are either, friends and family of patients, or employees. They may be buying for someone who is sick or maybe buying for a new baby. Sometimes they are an employee getting away from a stressful day and want to purchase something for themselves. Whatever the case, we should be ready to meet that need.

Shopping online will not give you the personal interaction with someone who can answer your questions and help you choose a gift when you are not sure what to buy.

Creating A Destination Location

One of the best things you can do as a manager is Market Research. At least twice a year you should visit other gift shops in your area or maybe even while you are out of town on a trip. See what is selling, what the trends are and do some price comparison. Look at how they display their merchandise and what catches your eye. Sometimes you just need to see what is out there to reinforce the things you are doing right and see what you could be doing better.

What makes your gift shop better than the one down the street? Is it the volunteers and staff, the atmosphere, the merchandise?

Merchandise should be relevant and trendy but affordable.

Décor should reflect the current trends and be inviting. Lighting should be good, floors and shelves should be neat, organized and clean.

If you offer the same merchandise at basically the same price, you must have something that makes your gift shop unique and special.

Offer a frequent shopper program.

Example: Create a punch card and offer a punch for purchases over a certain dollar amount. \$25 purchase is worth one punch. After 10 punches you get a percentage off your next purchase or a card worth a dollar amount off your next purchase.

Offer free gift wrapping or a free gift bag and tissue with purchase over a certain dollar amount.

Create a Facebook page or use other means of social media to get the word out. Social Media is a tool that is under- utilized in the retail business. It is a free tool to reach your customers.

Volunteers and staff should go above and beyond to make your customers happy. Greet each customer with a smile and thank them for their purchase. Even when a customer does not make a purchase, thank them for coming in.

Have a merchandise plan. Your merchandise plan should guide your buying decisions. Clearly define your departments. Decide on your mark ups in advance.

If you have “proven winners” make sure you keep those items in stock. Introduce new merchandise at least a few times a year. And don’t over buy seasonal merchandise.

Know when to get rid of duds. Duds are those purchases we make that go nowhere! We have all had them. Get creative when it comes to getting rid of them. Have a sidewalk sale or use them as a giveaway or BOGO sale. If you have tried all these and you still have them, donate to a local nursing home if appropriate, homeless shelters, daycares, etc. LET IT GO!!

Display new merchandise and seasonal merchandise at the entrance. Create clear site lines from the cash wrap to see the entire shop. ADA guidelines require a minimum of 36” between isles for wheelchair accessibility. A counter height of 36” should be available for handicapped access when checking out.

Offer payroll deduction for employees if possible.

Offer discounts for employees and volunteers during hospital week, volunteer week, etc.

Print coupons (with an expiration date)

Host special shopping events such as Holiday Open House, Hospital Week, Nurses Week, etc.

Offer a BOGO

If you have a Facebook page offer a discount for reaching a goal (example: When we reach 1000 likes you will receive a discount if you mention our Facebook page)

Advertise special events and new merchandise in your hospital newsletter

Host a Trunk Show

Signage Is Important! Let your customers know that their purchases are helping to support your hospital and community.

Because You Are Worth It

We have a BIG job! Sometimes we forget to appreciate all that is done to make our gift shops successful. We need to take time to thank our volunteers and staff for a job well done. And we need to stop beating ourselves up over the small stuff. If you are like me, I tend to take things personal when something doesn't go right or doesn't turn out the way we plan.

Encourage volunteers and staff to participate in the decision making process of your gift shop through a Gift Shop Committee or advisory committee.

We all want to be appreciated and a little appreciation goes a long way. Take time to send a thank you note to let volunteers and staff know they have done a good job and keep reminding them of the good work they are doing for our hospitals and how we appreciate that effort.

Thank you for using your gift of leadership to guide volunteers in your hospital gift shop!