

Attracting More Sports Fans to Your Store

Every hobby retailer understands that not all sports fans are sports collectors. But that shouldn't stop retailers from trying to turn more sports fans into customers.

Many hobby retailers believe they have to attract new card collectors in order to attract new customers. But that's not necessarily the case. Fans of all ages, especially kids, love stores that offer merchandise related to their favorite teams and players. That's the hook to getting those customers into your store.

Easier said than done, right? Not necessarily, but it may require you to change your way of thinking when it comes to how you market your store. Take an objective look at your store from a fan's point of view and look at the following:

- **Your store name** – Does it describe a card store, or a sports store? You obviously want to market your collectibles business, but don't be so specific that a sports fan might think you only deal in cards. For instance, notice the different mental images generated by “Joe's Cards and Collectibles” as opposed to “Joe's House of Sports” or “Joe's Fan of the Game Shop”
- **Window displays** – What are the most popular teams in your area? Is there something with their logos in your window? There should be if you want to attract the attention of local sports fans.
- **Inventory** – When a sports fan walks into your store, what can you offer them? Sure, cards are an easy option, but you should have other choices such as photos, yearbooks, jerseys, posters, T-shirts or anything else depicting the local favorites. Displays of autographed photos and other memorabilia always seem to catch the eye of fans.
- **The right atmosphere** – Again, you have to set the mood with a sports environment, not just a card store. That means offering promotions such as fantasy sports contests, having games on the TV, ticket giveaways or autograph appearances.
- **Market to sports fans** – Make sure you are getting your name in front of sports fans by promoting your store with ads in the sports section of your local paper, sponsoring youth sports, promotions involving the local minor-league teams, ads on sports-talk radio or cable TV ads on sports stations. Again, make sure to market your store as a destination for all sports fans.

What about the kids? Most kids love sports, so there's no reason your store shouldn't be on their list of places to visit on a regular basis. Again, even if a youngster is an experienced collector or not, your store needs to work to attract their business. Make sure you're doing the following:

- **Work with local schools** – Whether you offer free cards as a reward for good grades, visit schools to speak about card collecting or donate cards as prizes for school events, you must have some presence with schools in your area.
- **Support local sports** – Link your store to local Little League, Pop Warner and even AYSO teams. Offer special discounts at your store, donate cards to teams or offer to host special “team parties” at your store.
- **Host kids events** – Birthday parties, Halloween parties, Saturday morning specials, gaming tournaments and pizza parties are all popular with young customers (and just as importantly, their parents).

Attracting more youngsters and local sports fans to your store is important to the success of your business. The key is giving them a reason to visit your store on a regular basis. To do so, make your store a destination for all sports fans in your area, not just those who are die-hard collectors.