

Making the Most of Industry Promotions

Running a successful hobby store requires a lot of time and effort. Much of that effort is focused on getting customers into the store itself. Fortunately for hobby retailers, there are a variety of programs offered by Upper Deck and other card manufacturers, league licensors, and even a number of distributors that are designed to help stores attract customers and boost sales.

Successful retailers have learned how to take these programs and turn them into major revenue producers for their stores. You can do the same by following some of these tips:

- **Try anything and everything** – We've all seen little kids turn their nose up at certain foods, while their parents are pleading, "How do you know you won't like it if you don't try it?" Well, some hobby retailers turn their noses up at the idea of running some of the various hobby promotions being offered by the industry. They assume that only certain types of promotions will work in their store. Don't make that same mistake. Take advantage of anything and everything offered to your store. Yes, some programs will generate better results than others, but all programs will make your store more appealing to different segments of your customer base, and give current and prospective customers a reason to walk through your door.

- **Get the word out** – While many of the industry's current promotions are designed to be easily implemented by hobby retailers, the programs will only be successful when a retailer gets behind the promotion with local marketing and promotional support. That means sending out e-mails to customers, mentioning the event on your website, handing out fliers to customers, in-store signage the days and weeks leading up to the event, investing in local advertising and, if appropriate, sending out press releases to your local media outlets. The more people who know of your event, the more likely it will succeed.

- **Add some bells and whistles** – Why run exactly the same promotion as your nearest competitor? If you want to attract more people to your store events, you have to add some extra elements to the promotion. That means, for instance, adding contests, prize giveaways and/or special product discounts during the event, providing free food, extending your store hours and/or inviting a local celebrity to the event as an autograph guest. And if you're expecting extra customers, be sure to have extra staff on hand.

- **Out of sight, out of mind** – For an ongoing promotion, such as Upper Deck's Kids Rewards program, your store should always have something posted to attract the attention of those who are not familiar with the program. Don't assume that after a week or two everyone knows about a new promotion.

- **Take advantage of your distributors** – Distributors offer a variety of special programs and services during the course of the year as a way to build customer loyalty. Whether it's a warehouse sale, a "Meet the Manufacturer" event, special discounts or promotional giveaways, take advantage of these programs. Each is designed to help your business.

- **Show your appreciation** – If a program sponsored by a league, manufacturer or distributor is a success for your store, let the sponsor know how well the program worked and how much you appreciate it. Share your ideas on how you enhanced the program, or what you think could be done to make the program better in the future. When program sponsors know that the time and resources they have invested into helping hobby shops is being executed and appreciated, they are more likely to continue to invest in those programs.

Making your store a fun place to shop is the best way to keep customers coming back again and again. Taking part in the various promotions offered each year by companies like Upper Deck and others in the industry help give customers a reason to return to your store.