

Become Known as the “Local Expert” on Collectibles

Collectors like to buy from someone they trust, and generally people will trust someone they believe is an expert in their profession. Most hobby retailers have built up a wealth of knowledge about sports collectibles in the years they've been in the business, but their customers aren't always aware of that knowledge. And if you want to win the trust of new collectors, you have to let them know of your expertise in the hobby.

Like any other asset of your business, you must promote your expertise to potential customers. The best way to do that is to solidify your reputation in the community as an expert in the field. Here are some ways to accomplish this valuable goal:

- **Education process** – Needless to say, if you want to be considered an expert then you better know what you're talking about. You don't have to have in-depth knowledge of every area of the hobby, but you should know a little bit about everything. Read up on the history of card collecting, become familiar with the trends in various areas of memorabilia, get an idea of what's considered valuable and what's considered common. If you promote yourself as being knowledgeable about collectibles, you'll quickly lose credibility if you give inaccurate or misleading information. Be sure you're subscribing to (and reading) the various hobby publications and e-newsletters to stay up to date with the latest hobby news, and keep a supply of the various reference books on hand. Become familiar with those books so you'll know the fastest place to look when posed with a tough question. Also, become familiar with dealers around the country who specialize in certain types of collectibles (i.e., jerseys, vintage autographs) and consult with them if you need additional information.

- **Contact newspapers and radio** – Ask them if they would be interested in a question-and-answer column or a call-in show regarding collectibles. Be sure you promote this as something that would be a service to their readers or listeners, as opposed to an advertisement for your business. If there's no immediate interest in your services, consider running “Did You Know?” ads where you educate the audience about a segment of the hobby while promoting your store. For instance, you could explain the mystique behind the T206 Honus Wagner card, explain the definition of a rookie card, or distinguish game-used jerseys from game-model jerseys. This will generate questions from those who see your ads and help build your reputation as a knowledgeable dealer.

- **Offer insight to your local media** – If your local team earns a spot in the Super Bowl or World Series, let your local media know about the buying frenzy it has triggered for collectibles. When a story related to collectibles is getting national media attention, contact your local media outlets to offer a local angle to the story. Not every contact will result in a story, but the more familiar they are with your business, the more likely they will be to contact you when they need your assistance.

- **Keep on top of industry promotions** – Make sure your store is participating in every hobby store program being offered by manufacturers and licensors. These programs usually take place at stores around the country, so your participation establishes your reputation as being in touch with stores nationwide. You should also be aware of wrapper redemption offered by Upper Deck and their Kids Rewards program, both of which encourage repeat purchases by customers.

- **Speak up** – Offer your services as a speaker to youth groups, schools, the chamber of commerce, your local library or other community organizations. Put together a 30-minute presentation about some of the various segments of the hobby and showcase your knowledge of those areas. You'll be surprised how many people in the audience will have stories to share about their experiences in the hobby, and you can use that to invite them to your store to get reacquainted with cards and memorabilia.

- **Offer appraisals** – Many people have cards and memorabilia tucked away in their homes and would love to know what items are worth. Promote your store as a place where they can bring items to be appraised. This will bring new customers to your store, and could give you a chance to purchase some great items for your store.

Your knowledge of the hobby and industry can be a very powerful tool in attracting more customers to your store. The more you're willing to expand that knowledge, the more powerful this resource will become. Being known as the local expert on collectibles and your ability to promote that knowledge is a great way to bring new business to your store.