



# Affordable Marketing Tools For Strip Centres

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Today, without an effective marketing program a strip retail centre cannot compete. The centre across the street will draw away customers with its own advertising, special events, community activities and supersavers.

Regardless of the size of a centre or marketing budget, there are ways to compete and also boost the bottom line. Strip centre promotions do not need to cost a lot of money to be effective. However, a small budget may take a little longer to reach marketing goals. Ten affordable marketing concepts that effectively boost the bottom line follow.

## **GIFT WITH PURCHASE**

For purchases totalling a specified amount - for example, \$100 or more - the customer receives a free gift. This gives the customer an added incentive to continue shopping and spending in the centre. Be sure the item given away does not compete with merchandise sold at the centre. Also be sure to track the names and addresses of customers redeeming receipts. This information not only indicates who the customers are, but also provides you a focused mailing list for direct-mail promotions.

## **FREQUENT SHOPPER PROGRAM**

Frequent shopper programs are a great way to increase sales as well as reward loyal customers. The reward could be a special gift, a centre gift certificate or other benefits. One approach to such a program is to give participating customers a printed punch card. Each purchase totalling a set amount, say \$50, receives a punch on the card. When the card is fully punched, say at \$500, the customer will receive a free gift or a choice of gifts of equal value.

## **CENTRE GIFT CERTIFICATES**

Gift certificates are a way to put dollars back into the centre when used as prizes for promotions. Be sure to inform the merchants about the program and the procedures for accepting the centre wide gift certificates.

### **COUPON BOOK**

Coupons generate traffic and attract new customers. Capture valuable information, such as the names and addresses of customers who redeem them, on the back of the coupon. Coupons are also a good way to measure the effectiveness of a promotion. When merchants are responsible for coupon offers, be sure to monitor the quality of their offer, which is crucial to the success of a coupon. Also, be aware that coupons providing dollar amounts off merchandise generally draw a higher redemption rate than percentage discounts.

### **COUPON MAILER**

Lighter than a coupon book, a coupon mailer is printed on large-size paper, depending upon the number of participating stores. Since weight determines postal rates, a coupon mailer provides the same exposure as a coupon book at a much lower postage cost. Such a piece may be mailed only to those customers on the centre store's preferred mailing lists, and/or to targeted zip codes surrounding the centre via marriage mail (the mailing of one piece along with seven to nine other pieces of literature) by using a direct-mail house. It is much more cost-effective to send materials via marriage mail than by solo mail (the mailing of one piece alone). For limited budgets, marriage mail is the recommended method of distribution.

### **SPECIAL SALES**

For smaller budgets, concentrate advertising and sales efforts during peak buying periods: Autumn/Easter, Summer/back to school and November/December. After the merchants and customers grow accustomed to these events, add others to the calendar.

### **SENIOR CITIZEN DISCOUNTS**

Cater to the older customer by offering a Senior Shopper Card that entitles seniors to discounts or other special offers. Rather than mailing the cards, ask seniors to pick up their cards at a specific centre store or the centre's information and customer service desk. Be sure to record names and addresses to create a senior mailing list for future promotions.

### **EMPLOYEE INCENTIVES**

Offer discounts or special sales incentives to employees of the shopping centre retailers.

### **EMPLOYEE EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

To help improve merchant skills, hold seminars or clinics on visual merchandising, customer service and retailing. Community colleges are excellent sources for educated, experienced seminar speakers. Use a secret-shopper service to identify merchants who need to improve customer service. It is found that stores that rank low on customer service on secret-shopper surveys also have poor sales. These surveys can be an excellent indicator of troubled retailers at the centre.

### **WELCOME NEIGHBOUR PROGRAMS**

Check with the local chamber of commerce, banks and welcome service organisations to find out about any existing program of newcomer packets. Include the centre's merchant directory, a magnet with the centre's logo on it and a shopping bag or other novelty item in the packets. It's a fantastic way to reach potential customers who are new to an area and actively searching for specific types of retailers. Putting the centre's name in front of new residents early may even help cement their new shopping patterns!

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