

COLUMNS

Crafting cheer through holiday messaging

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Even after you choose between "Merry Christmas" and "Happy Holidays," crafting an effective message during the holiday season still is not exactly easy.

Look at Starbucks. The coffee chain's new red holiday cup sparked criticism from those who feel the minimalist design is not Christmas-y enough.

When the holiday season arrives, small businesses cannot simply slap a snowflake on the design or add a dash of peppermint to the recipe and call it "good enough."

While this time of year is full of opportunities for powerful brand messages the shiny gold and silver tinsel that you can toss into your marketing mix holiday content and ad messages require more than symbols of the season, real or metaphoric, to be effective.

Where business and holidays connect

Think of a Venn diagram. One circle is the holiday season and everything that goes with it, such as food, festivities, gifts and good spirits. The other circle is your business: products, services, employees and sales.

The space that overlaps is key to effective holiday messaging.

What do your customers want during this season? What are they searching for?

Customers are preparing to cook family meals, host holiday parties and shop for gifts. So offer recipes, how-to's, tips and gift-giving guides.

Effective content marketing

Retailers have several opportunities to tailor their marketing for the holidays.

Between Black Friday sales, Cyber Monday deals and Christmas gift guides, the content calendar practically fills itself.

But this is a mixed blessing.

When it is time to create your own content, how do you make sure your message stands out in the sea of similar guides?

The answer goes back to a basic principle I identified in [5 W's of digital marketing](#): Knowing your customer.

Your holiday message needs to resonate with your customer. It does not matter if you write the most engaging post about the best cufflinks for men if they are searching for snowshoes.

Or, if they are more excited about hitting the slopes for ski season than the presents under the tree, gift guides are not worth the effort.

Match your content to your customer.

Understand the holiday spirit

Service-based businesses must get a little more creative to stand out and claim a slice of the pie usually reserved for retail during the holiday season.

Again, it is not as simple as adding a reindeer to your email banner or hanging lights on your storefront.

Cheer and festivity are abundant tap into that excitement, but do not rely on it to do all the work for you.

Take it further by connecting with the underlying motivation that drives your customer. Do not simply focus on the obvious but dig deeper.

For an auto shop, your customers may be planning for holiday road trips. But they are not driving across the country because they enjoy holiday traffic and winter roads. They plan the trip despite those challenges because they want to spend the holidays with their family and the people they love.

Your content should reflect that it is not about car maintenance or road trip advice. It is getting them safely to their family in time for the holidays.

Look closer at the holiday spirit this season.

Holiday parties are not pure festivity. They are community and friendship.

Presents are not only gifts. They represent love and generosity.

The snowflakes, reindeer and lights are more than tradition or decoration. They spread cheer and happiness.

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON is the perfect time to spread a little cheer along with your brand message.

Combine the power of the holiday spirit with your knowledge of your customer for powerful content with an effective message this season.

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