

Blog and FREE Stuff:

www.todaysdisplays.ca

Products: eBooks, Quick Notes, Audio/Video:

www.todaysdisplays.com



COLLECTING



BY LINDA MCKENDRY,
VMPC

customers

READER QUESTION: What can I do with my product lines to appeal to more collectors? Can I show any of my products as collectibles?

LINDA'S REPLY: If you're trying to figure out this market, read this quote by Robin Guild, (co-founder of Designers Guild in London) from his book, *Homeworks*. He states: "We are all collectors whether we know it or not, and we all collect in different ways. Some people collect at random like magpies. Others take endless time and infinite pains to seek out the one thing they're looking for. My own tastes are so catholic that I am an incurable accumulator. I sometimes think that *it's the things that collect me*."

Some shopper's ideas of collectibles are those items presented as a pre-designed product line such as Beanie Babies, Boyd's Bears, or Precious Moments. Then there are people who have generic collections like spoons, thimbles or teacups. If they're stamped with names and pictures of places then they're really mementos or souvenirs. In both of these cases the items are somewhat the same size and shape, only varying in the styles and colors. Then there are those who collect given items such as eggs, bells, candles, angels, etc. that are varied in color, pattern, style, shape and size.

How should collectibles be displayed? For serious collectors who stop by your store on a regular basis just to check out the new introductions or items being retired (never discontinued!) it's important to keep all the related items together. Choose an appropriate fixture with good signing that helps the customer to identify the line immediately. Within the fixture itself the items can be rearranged into mini displays, complete with props where appropriate. Don't forget to rotate all the items through the prime selling space, close to eye level and comfortable reach. Signing here is critical so the serious collector knows which items are new, which are being retired, and which are being offered as a bargain to be snatched up while the opportunity exists.

It's important to position all the different items in a single collection together so the customers can make clearer distinctions between the details. I've watched shoppers agonize over the fine details of the features between two Royal Doulton figurines in order to decide which one they will purchase "this time." Good, focused, direct lighting enhances the experience.

If you sell expensive, fragile, one-of-a-kind pieces, then it's critical to have well-lit, glass-encased fixtures that are dust free and locked to minimize handling. Chronic collectors of these kinds of products will take the time to wait for you to open the showcase. Gently, almost reverently, take out their selection and present it to them on a counter where they can examine every detail while you point out the engravings, stamps and signatures. I've seen merchants put on white cotton gloves to handle pieces for sale. You must motivate yourself to become

a player in this animated display, to become part of the visual merchandising and impart quality and value to the piece.

Cross-merchandising needs to be done with greater care when working with a line designed to be collected. You don't want to distract the customer who is hooked already by showing too many different products they can collect. If they become overwhelmed or confused they may just turn and walk away rather than take the time to choose a given item. It's far better to create displays of collectibles with accessories such as frames, compartmentalized shadow boxes, glass domes or other well designed units that provide the collector with a safe place to store and protect their collections.

The rules for use of props also apply to collectibles. The prop must point to the product, enhance its features, as well as be used to target market the item. Do not let the props distract from the products. In a showcase with fine porcelain figurines, where everything is smooth and shiny, you may want to introduce a single, exceptional quality, hand-wrapped silk flower to add a small element of texture. Also pull away one figurine from the rest: for example, position a bride next to a white rose or gardenia. As always, the selection of props should be based on the color, pattern and style of the items they will be shown with, each enhancing the other.

Collectibles need more signing than other items in order to point out their various features. Many come with biographies of the artists or descriptions of the manufacturing process which add value. Always display this information close to the products. In some cases it's even appropriate to put this information in a frame that is part of the display. And by all means, if the item is very heavy or fragile, don't be shy about placing a sign that says so near the item.

Always remember to show lots of variety. If a collector buys more than one piece at a time it's usually because they can't decide which one and fear that their favorites will be retired or discontinued. Variety will entice them back to buy again and again. I fondly remember the day in Mary's Keepsakes (Oakville, Ontario) when I was waiting to speak to Mary as she waited on a distinguished lady who was purchasing three identical Beanie Babies. The customer was explaining how each was for a different grandchild "because they were collecting these things." As Mary's register went *ca-ching*, she smiled and we both knew that these items were in fact collecting the customers.

To book Linda's services, call 905-813-8725 or write to VMPC, Visual Merchandising Presentation Consultants, 6309 Donway Drive, Mississauga, Ontario. L5V 1J6. □

www.todaysdisplays.com