



Oklahoma Main Street News

A quarterly newsletter published by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce

The Holidays are Upon Us

From parades, to visits with Santa, to jingle bells, to presents. The holidays mean one thing: money. Whether you are in business, or shopping in a business, you can't escape the holidays.

So, why not join them? We have asked around to Main Street communities across the state for their best holiday money makers, ideas and wish lists. And we received quite a few interesting ones.

Parades

One thing we know for certain. Oklahomans love parades! Especially holiday themed parades. Christmas parades are an institution on Main Street in Oklahoma. Parades are traffic-building events and take a great many volunteers to pull off successfully. While not usually a great retail day for your merchants, there won't be an option to make money if the stores are not open. Parades are great for your town's image because they promote the idea that downtown is a fun and busy place to be.

And who doesn't want that? There is a lot to consider, though, before hosting a parade. First, you

want to establish a theme. The best ones are centered around your community's particular personality. For instance, Stockyards City has a cowboy themed parade complete with a cowboy Santa because that fits their personality.

If you have a particular flavor in your community, then you should theme your parade around that flavor. Most are aimed at children so it could be a candy-centric theme, toys, bears, Sesame Street ... the list goes on. Much like a child's Christmas wish list.

It could be centered around a patriotic theme, the 12 days of Christmas, Christmas at the Movies, let your imagination run wild!

Okmulgee Main Street Inc. hosts a parade centered around a Festival of Lights with a different theme each year. Prior to the parade, they host a pre-show concert in front of the Creek Council House Museum.

It could even be centered around pets! Ponca City Main Street has an annual HolidayPet Parade and Contest. Winners receive ribbons and all participants can enjoy refreshments and donated doggy treats.



Ponca City Main Street Holiday Pet Parade contestant



Ponca City Main Street Holiday Pet Parade contestants

Some parades divide participants into commercial and non-commercial classifications. If you do this you might want to charge for commercial entries to boost your award payouts. However, you may decide to keep your parade non-commercial. If so, don't allow businesses to enter an undecorated float or vehicle. All entries should be decorated per the theme of the parade.

You may also have enough of a certain category to add the entry as its own category, beyond the floats, bands, animals, vehicles, walking units, etc. For example you may have several area fire departments participating and want to have a separate competition with them.

If you plan to have a competition, then you need judges. Three to five will work. Give them a great viewing area

Shop Local

by Linda Barnett

Main Street has enthusiastically adopted the recent Shop Local movement. However, Main Street has been promoting local shopping for 25 years. We understand where our sales tax dollars come from and how much of it stays in the local economy. We understand the benefit of supporting your local entrepreneur because he is your neighbor, your kid's soccer coach and your Sunday School teacher. We "get" it and we have "gotten" it for a long time. Unfortunately, it took a recession for many others to climb aboard.

Many of you have been to the website of the 3/50 Project. It started as a blog from a local business woman in Minnesota. She had an idea, posted it on her blog and it went viral. She said, "What if you as a consumer picked the three local businesses in your community that you would miss the most if they weren't there and you vowed to spend \$50 a month in those businesses. What kind of an impact would that have on the economy?"

If half of the employed population spent \$50 a month in locally owned independent businesses, it would generate more than \$42.6 billion in revenue. And, for every \$100 spent in locally owned independent businesses, \$68 returns to the community in the form of taxes, payroll and other expenditures. If you spend it in a national chain, only \$43 stays here and if you spend it online, nothing comes home. Pick three, spend fifty and save your local economy.

Now it is a national movement. They have posters, stickers and all kinds of marketing ideas free to use from their website. One of the reasons this has been so effective is that it doesn't shame you for occasionally shopping at the big box store. All of us are going to go to WalMart to shop at one time or another. The movement promotes reason. Think about your local businesses when you are shopping. If you can purchase the same thing from a local retailer at a comparable price, then make that purchase locally. There are things you need that you can't purchase locally. Fine. But if you can and it doesn't hurt you financially, purchase those that you can at home. You may need to do a little research to figure out what products you can reasonably purchase locally and it may be a little inconvenient but it is the right thing to do.

Eating local has really taken off. I even saw a vanity plate that read "EATLCL" the other day. There are many arguments for eating local but again the emphasis is on "reason". I really liked a quote from Melissa Scaramucci, a local restaurateur, who said, "Do I eat at Chick-fil-A? Of course. I am not a saint. I think it is like recycling and everything else. You do as much as you can. You can't let it dictate your life, but you can let it lead your life."

Wishing all of Main Street a very merry and local holiday season.



*Two national campaigns to encourage local shopping.
Start planning now on how you will use them next year.*

For your own signs and images visit

facebook.com/SmallBusinessSaturday and shiftyourshopping.org.



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Holiday Tips for Retailers

In part by Margie Johnson, President, Shop Talk

Make the holidays extra special for your local businesses this season. Help them create and manage the momentum in their stores through a combination of special events, visual enhancements, community ties, special services, and an enthusiastic staff. Create a “buzz” to assure your community that shopping at your local businesses will be fun and hassle-free.

3. Have a selection of grab-and-go pre-wrapped items to assist time-starved customers.

4. Make the store appeal to all the senses through smell, sight, sound, touch and taste. think of how you can elaborate on each sense.

5. Advertise early shopper programs.

large store logo, carrying oversized bags that also feature your store’s logo.

10. Set up a temporary cart or table offering package wrapping and shipping.

11. Create an event to communicate via Facebook.

12. Make a joyful noise -- carefully select



Here are some stellar holiday-season starters that are low-cost and easy to implement for the businesses in your area. Share with them!

1. Start with a kick-off the holiday party for the staff. Use this as an opportunity to communicate the marketing strategies, advertisements, public relations, etc., to which your business is committed.

2. Play up the value of shopping at your store, ie. create groups of price-point items by clustering them by price tiers.

Next year, get started with early shopper programs even before Thanksgiving.

6. Hire runners and/or doormen to help people get their packages to their cars.

7. Use a photo of Santa with a different child every day in your ads.

8. Write a “thank you” note to Santa’s visitors. Include a store coupon fo a return visit.

9. Offer delivery to nearby offices. Put the runners in big shirts or sweatshirts with a

small musical groups to perform in your store, donate to arts/musical council, etc.

13. Invite customers to create an ornament to bring in to place on the charity tree. The store can choose two or three charities to support through a \$2-\$3 donation for each ornament received. Cap the number of ornaments at 50-75.

Select a combination of promotions and ideas to give your business a competitive edge this holiday season. **MAKE BUSINESS HAPPEN** -- don’t wait for it to happen!

Create a Holiday Display: Ideas for Dressing a Window with a Winter Theme

by Tracey Cox

As Christmas draws closer, an inviting window display becomes a priority for smart small business owners. For many of them, having a window display that attracts customers is essential for holiday sales success. As potential customers drive or walk by, the window catches their eye and tempts them to stop and browse. This doesn't have to be expensive or overwhelming.

Window Display Basics

No matter what display theme is chosen, there are a few basic display decorating tips to follow to create a good foundation for the store's holiday display.

- Start with a clean window.
- Cover the entire floor of the display with a cloth in a solid color that coordinates with the intended theme color. Artificial snow or white batting makes a good foundation for a display, too.
- Don't forget to dress up the walls of the display area. If the theme will be outdoor related, consider a sky blue backdrop.

- Anchor a large window display area with something large, such as a big artificial tree or a comfortable looking chair. Trying to fill a large area with many small pieces can make it look messy or empty.

- Remember to look at the display from the outside during the process. Sometimes, a display that looks good from inside doesn't look good from the street.

Holiday Window Display Themes

Holiday window themes can be a more generic winter display or a very religious nativity scene. There is no right or wrong answer, but a business owner needs to carefully consider their customer base and the type of merchandise or service the business offers before making a decision. For example, a Christian bookstore without a religious themed display would seem a little strange to customers.

One great theme for a holiday window display is building a snowman. A sledding, ice skating or ice fishing theme would also work well. These outdoor winter displays are a good



option for stores that don't want to change out the entire display as soon as Christmas is over. Most of the display can remain for several weeks after the holiday without seeming out of place.

With a little planning, a little creativity, and a little patience, you can create a great window display.



Holidays

Continued from front page.

and then select a great area to present the awards.

If you would like a list of some possible rules and regulations, contact the Oklahoma Main Street Center and we will get that information to you. There is an booklet, prepared by Main Street Director, Linda Barnett, that covers this very subject and we are happy to share.

Ball Drops and Money Give-Aways.

Another popular activity is the ball drop and/or money give-away around the holidays. Whether you drop them from a helicopter, shoot them out of a cannon, sling-shot them, drop them from the roof of a building, or hand out a ticket from each business, these little items garner an audience.

With ball drops, participants wait for their opportunity to receive discounts, gifts, and money from participating merchants around town.

Some cash give-aways require a

purchase at participating businesses to qualify for large prize money. Most require you to be present to win thus enhancing your Main Street area twice. Once from the initial purchase and another from the foot traffic of those waiting to see who won.



Miami Main Street and Santa Claus!

But if the thought of picking up thousands of discarded tickets leaves you a little cold, Sapulpa Main Street came up with the great idea to give another give-away on Monday through the local radio station, therefore people had another chance to win -- and take their tickets home with them to throw away later and not around the town square.

Santa Visits

We can't forget about Santa

throughout all of this. The kids love Santa. For the past 14 years Miami Main Street, Inc., along with numerous local organizations, has teamed up to bring Christmas to local youths. What started as a breakfast with Santa, has turned into "Santa and a Movie." In 2007 the event moved from the historic Coleman Theater to the Miami Cineplex, enabling the group to show a current first run movie. Free 5x7 photos are taken with Santa and the first 300 children receive free entry into the theater for a special showing. Each child comes away with an armful of gifts, including books, fruit, candy, small toys, and the chance to win a bike (with safety gear) and other great prizes.

Sulphur Main Street has an annual Cookies and Milk with Santa after their Christmas Parade and includes a photo opportunity as well.

This time of year lends itself to many great opportunities for your Main Street program. All it takes is some willingness to brave the weather, some creative thinking about your area, and volunteers!



Lined up and ready to see Santa Claus during the Miami Main Street's Santa and a Movie event

Merchants and Special Events

by Todd Noon

For many retailers, the sound of this year's holiday season may be less "Ho, Ho Ho!" and more "No, No, No!," as in no customers, no revenue, and no end in sight.

Many indicators foretell that this is going to be a tough retail season for small merchants. But, as a Main Street professional, you are in an ideal position to help your downtown business owners and show them the true value of Main Street in the process.

We all know that one way for Main Streets to stay competitive during the upcoming shopping season is to host special events. They are a great way for Main Street businesses to find new customers and generate extra revenue while spending almost nothing to do so.

There's just one problem, though -- merchants who can best be described as "business prevention experts" or BPEs.

For savvy business owners, well-planned and well-executed special events are a smart and cost-effective way for them to get "more through the door" when there are plenty of "feet on the street." Unfortunately, however, in almost every downtown across the country, there seems to be no shortage of BPEs -- business owners who say they want more customers but who close during your special events and don't make a single sale. These BPEs then typically get angry at you for "making" them close, all the while ignoring the hundreds of even thousands of potential customers you brought to their closed doors at no cost to them.

But, don't despair. Here are a few tips to work with your downtown merchants (including BPEs) so that they can tie in to your holiday events, make some sales and see the benefit of working with your Main Street program on other events.



Tip #1: Determine Your Event. Sounds pretty obvious, doesn't it? Certainly, it doesn't take an advanced degree to come up with ideas for special programs,

but developing successful events -- ones that bring lots of people to your downtown and into your businesses -- does require some critical thinking and observation on your part. Assess the mix of businesses you have in your downtown, see if they might have some common theme, then develop an event that will attract their interest.





Tip #2: Separate Good BPEs from Bad BPEs.

Once you've determined your special event, the next step is to get your downtown businesses involved. Don't waste your time and energy, however, with a scatter-shot approach that aims to help every business whether they want it or not. Here's where your powers of observation come into play again. Not all BPEs want to be BPEs. Some of them really want to be better business people (these are called good BPEs), but they just don't know how or don't have the time to devote to it. The key is to figure out who those people are, then separate them from business owners who wear their BPE title as a status symbol (bad BPEs).



Tip #3: Help your "Good" BPEs.

After you've analyzed your downtown and identified your "good" BPEs, concentrate the efforts of your Main Street program on helping these willing merchants tie in to the event. Start small and work with only a few at a time so that you can really devote the time and resources necessary to ensure their success. What does this help look like?

It really depends on the kinds of events you're doing, but you might want to try some of the following: offer to design and print day-of-event coupons, bounce-back coupons, or fliers announcing a sale or in-store special; suggest inexpensive ways to beautify the store during the event (by using balloons, flowers and such); offer to set up cross-promotions with other downtown merchants; help them develop ideas for in-store contests; and offer to create and send an email newsletter for them; or help them create and send their own. The list is really limitless, but the key to it

is as easy as possible for your merchants to participate in your special event.



Tip #4: Stay in Touch.

Remember to keep in contact with the "good" BPEs that you've decided to help tie in to your event. If it's a one-day event, check with them throughout the day to see how they are doing and adjust the game plan if necessary. If it's a multi-day event, talk with them each day and find out what's working, what's not and, again, adjust the game plan accordingly. In either case, always conduct a post-event meeting so you can talk about how your event went and ways to improve it. It is so important that you demonstrate to your downtown business owners that you and your Main Street program really are partners in their success. Staying in touch with them, holding their hand and walking them through it will show that better than anything else.



Tip #5: Encourage your "Good" BPEs to Help Plan Other Events.

By helping to plan events, business owners have a unique opportunity to organize them in ways that best meet their needs. When merchants are part of the planning process, they have a real stake in its success and will be far more inclined to put some effort into tying their business into the event. Tell your merchants when the Promotion or Events Committee meets



Stockyards City Main Street's Ladies' Night at the Mercantile

and encourage them to get involved. If many business owners can't make your meetings, provide them with a copy of the minutes so they know what's going on.

Holding successful downtown events that your merchants embrace is not always easy. In fact, it can be downright difficult. Whatever challenges you face -- closed doors during special events, merchants angry because you're closing the street, complaints that special events hurt business, or any number of other frustrating issues -- you are not alone. These issues are everywhere.

With some hard work and creativity on your part, and with the cooperation of "good" Business Prevention Experts, you can get your merchants to view special events as a cost-effective way to grow their business rather than an inconvenience.

Thank You!



Left to right: Jeremy Zeller, economic restructuring; Kelli Yadon, marketing and social media; Linda Barnett, director; Tracey Cox; design and promotions; and Larry Lucas, designer.

The Oklahoma Main Street Center staff wishes all of you a very happy, and safe, holiday season.

We thank you for all your hard work on behalf of your communities and look forward to working with you in the coming year. See you in 2012!

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The Oklahoma Main Street Center provides training
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mercial district revitalization. The communities in the
Oklahoma Main Street Program actively implement
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