



Crafting Promotions

In-store events, gift with purchase help drive traffic and sales

By Priscilla Martel

Economists call it the “Amazon Effect,” the steady consumer shift from brick-and-mortar stores to one-click online shopping. But regardless of their size, specialty retailers can craft clever promotions to build foot traffic. Specialty retailers are finding success working with their cookware suppliers, their local communities and cookbook authors to bring in customers.

Independents need to understand the “saturation points” in their market and “curate” what they sell differently from the online retailer, observes Mary Rogers, director of marketing communications Cuisinart, based in Stamford, Conn. Among the tactics to thwart showrooming and the flight to online shopping are special events. She feels that “promoting those types of event on social media and Facebook is very smart.” Consumers’ frequent independents for “hard core cooking advice,” she says. And an educated staff and smart promotions boost the potential for retail success.

Help from Suppliers

“Events are truly one of the best ways for a gourmet store to differentiate itself from the clutter of mass retailers and the online marketplace,” says Mike Gerardi, senior sales planning manager at Le Creuset of America Inc., based in Early Branch, S.C., because events play into the consumer need for “authentic experiences.” The specialty store with an educated staff allows consumers to “interact” with a brand and convey its story, he says. Le Creuset typifies the ways a manufacturer supports its retailers’ promotional efforts. Gerardi explains they offer everything from sales demos to employee training guides and digital assets that support social media and website efforts. For customers with cooking schools, the company may provide cookware for the class as well as attendee giveaways.

Gerardi advises retailers to look to their sales reps for ideas and support. “We encourage our retailers to



work closely with our sales reps for all available ways of creating unique sales driving opportunities,” he says.

Todd Myers, vice president of sales at Wüsthof Trident of America Inc., based in Norwalk, Conn., agrees. The knife company promotes “brainstorming” between reps and retailers to build events that succeed. It’s the shared responsibility of the store owner and manufacturer to be creative in constructing a “worthwhile event” with “meaningful product deals” or “kickers,” he adds.

Cuisinart’s sales reps have scheduled cookware promotions and a calendar especially for independent retailers, explains Rogers. Reps know what cookware items are on promotion and how they could be used for a special event.

One promotion that fills classes and events is a gift with purchase (GWP), which is arranged through the sales rep force. Le Creuset GWP programs are offered at various times, and retailers can leverage

▲ In-store events help drive sales of Le Creuset cookware and more at Plum’s Cooking Co. in Sioux Falls, S.D.

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them during special events, says Girardi. “We’ve had a GWP program for years but probably only started pushing it as a differentiation tool over the last three for independent retailers,” he says.



Cuisinart may do a kitchen tools GWP with cookware because it offers flexibility and makes sense to promote lower-cost items, says Rogers. “In general, we would be presenting the ideas to the retailer because there are other operational issues involved.” Such considerations include having ample product on hand to cover the promotion, says Rogers, noting that some manufacturers may promote items not necessarily part of their line.

Sponsored Classes

Large retailers often coordinate complex sponsorship programs with manufacturers and other colleagues. Think of the monthly Food and Wine Magazine cooking class series at Sur La Table, part of a 2012 multi-tier partnership between the store and magazine publisher. National retailers, such as Williams-Sonoma, may also have the wherewithal to offer free cooking classes and product discounts.

◀ **King Arthur Flour offers classes for all ages and skill levels at its Norwich, Vt., Baking Education Center.**

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Fast Fact

\$80.3B

estimated Q1 2015
e-commerce retail
sales.

An increase of
3.5 percent from
Q4 2014, while
overall retail sales
decreased
1.5 percent during
that same period.

Source: US Department
of Commerce

There are ample opportunities for independent retailers as well. Emile Henry USA Inc., for example, began offering sponsored classes to its retailers in 2014. One promotion includes an Emile Henry pizza stone that the retailer purchases at a discount. The pizza stone could be used as a GWP to entice customers to sign up for the pizza making class or to purchase Emile Henry cookware. "This is a new program for us," says Mia Papasidero, sales manager for the New Castle, Del.-based company. From 12 to 20 pieces of the company's cookware were sold at each of the in-store pizza making classes Emile Henry hosted this year, a "great success," she notes. [Editor's note: The author of this article, Priscilla Martel, has done events and demos for Emile Henry.]

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Mike Gerardi, Le Creuset of America Inc.

Cooks, Pots and Tabletops in Eugene, Ore., was one of the independents that took advantage of this program. "Emile Henry has been proactive in getting us involved to showcase our school," says owner Keith Ellis. He has also held classes conducted by teachers from his own

community, as well as programs with Wüsthof Trident of America and All-Clad. Ellis feels the presence of a manufacturer's chef representative "reinforces" his stores reputation for quality and offers a new way to talk about products. "It's one thing to have special sales and co-op ads, but a customer perceives this as pure selling." An in-store appearance by the manufacturer's rep or designated chef adds "gravitas to the message," he explains.

An added benefit of Wüsthof's in-store classes is that customers tend "to have more fun in the kitchen when tools are used effectively with improved understanding," says Myers. Wüsthof Trident of America has been offering knife skills classes to its retailers for 30 years.

Properly charging for a sponsored event is important, says Ellis. Typically classes in his store run \$45 to \$90. For an Emile Henry class, the charge is \$25. The fee means people are more likely to attend, he adds, noting that no-shows are "one of the banes of an open house."

Two years ago, the German cookware manufacturer WMF left the International Home + Housewares Show to reorganize and reposition itself with a "new focus" on its cookware lines says Deborah Corrado, General Manager North America. As part of this reorganization, there is a new warehouse with a 1.2-day turnaround and a new rep network, she explains. Special events and promotions are aiding the company in the relaunch of the line, which includes its 3-ply stainless cookware with thin, all stainless sides that are a "lighter and elegant" alternative to 7-ply products on the market, she says. A recent event at the Broadway Panhandler in New York featured the company's Perfect Pro Pressure cooker. And trunk shows, another of the manufacturer's promotional activities, "guarantee sell-through," says Corrado.

Striking the Proper Balance

When brainstorming a new promotional program, think about the needs of your local market as well as what a cookware manufacturer is offering. For Ellis, whose shop is located in an area known for its microbreweries, this means a summertime craft brew event. The shop hosts the outdoor event in a courtyard and "promotes the connection of beer and good food," says Ellis. The event will include pizza from the Fornetto ovens he sells.

◀ **Cooks Warehouse is already planning its 2016 events. Timed to coincide with the January Atlanta Gift Market, the three-store kitchenware retailer is planning a global culinary experience with multiple cookware vendors.**



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▲ Keith Ellis, owner of Cooks, Pots and Tabletops in Eugene, Ore., is one of the independents planning in-store events and taking advantage of vendors' GWP programs.

Wendy Allen and the team at Cooks Warehouse are planning a global culinary experience with multiple vendors timed to coincide with the January 2016 Atlanta International Gift & Home Furnishings Market. "This makes it easy to tie in with the vendors," explains Allen, who hopes to get multiple cookware manufacturers to participate. Customers will get a passport when they arrive and different offers at each of several stations set around the Atlanta area stores.

Susan Miller, director of the Baking Education Center at King Arthur Flour Co., stresses maintaining integrity when working with manufacturers. At the King Arthur campus in Norwich, Vt., occasional vendor-focused kitchen demos are held in the retail store. "We pride ourselves on having classes that are educational and focused," she says, so King Arthur seeks out equipment and ingredients that "best support the educational objectives" of the classes. "Sometimes that coincides with product selling in the King Arthur catalogue. And sometimes it doesn't," explains Miller. But the value most important to Miller is that the store is committed to making its customers "more capable and excited" about baking.

Recipe for Event Success – Cookbooks

Cookbooks are the starting point for many housewares events. Publishers may send authors

to stores selling cookbooks as part of a book tour; although with budget cuts, the expense-paid cookbook tour is less common than in the past. Retailers and authors are still working together to promote new titles.

Sur La Table's cooking schools recently promoted a class inspired by the James Beard Award-winning coobook, "Heritage." Sean Brock's first cookbook took home the 2015 award in the American Cooking category. Attendees of this hands-on class learned how to make Southern recipes from the book including Cracklin' Cornbread and Chicken Simply Roasted in a Skillet, made using a 12-inch Lodge cast iron skillet. Brock signed the bookplates, the classes were taught by Sur La Table's instructors, and attendees received signed copies of the book.

Cookbook authors and guest chefs often teach classes at King Arthur Flour's Baking Education Center. Gesine Bullock Prado has taught several in-depth hands-on and demo classes at King Arthur inspired by her baking books. On this summer's roster of classes is The Art of Making Gelato with Morgan Morano, author of the book of the same name.

Cookbook authors such as Bruce Weinstein seek out opportunities to promote their work. Weinstein's cookbook, "The Ultimate Ice Cream Book," published by Morrow, has sold more than 250,000 copies to date. "As an author, you have to look for opportunities everywhere to get your name out and get your book in front of people," he says. "I call stores all the time and ask if we can do signings and demos even if no manufacturer is involved." Recently this approach earned him and Mark Scarbrough, his co-author and partner, a demo spot at Sur La Table in Manhattan.

"Stores can reach out to authors, sure, and the best way to do that is through the publicists at the publishing houses," says Weinstein. He notes, however, that "more often than not" he brings in the bookings.

At Cooks, Pots and Tabletops, Ellis reaches cookbook authors directly through his membership in the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) where he meets them at the annual conference. Recently he hosted a cookbook author who arranged for a yogurt manufacturer to provide discount coupons for the store and class participants. "The author arranged that one, not the publisher," he explains.

Stores can approach manufacturers for demo help but, notes Weinstein, they may only send company spokespeople. He feels culinary professionals like himself add more credibility to an event. **TR**