

Preparing for Back to School Merchandising & Marketing TIPS

By Debby Swoboda – July 2007

As summer begins and the thoughts of back to school seem so far away, parents still need to start thinking about sending the kids back to school. And depending on how the summer is panning out, some parents are thinking about back to school sooner than others! The month of August should focus on back to school shopping which provides a great marketing opportunity for your store. Families are already in shopping mode, so capitalize on their mindset and help them get their kids off on the right foot, with a healthy start to the new school year. Whatever you do, make it fun and educational. Here are some fantastic ideas.

1. Events

■ Tasting Fair for Kids

Hold a kids' tasting fair and educational day. Let the kids vote on if they liked the item or if they didn't. Then create a "kid tasted & approved" shelf talker to post throughout the store to let parents know that this is something that their child would enjoy. Since the products were selected and tasted by kids. It's a great way to help kids taste healthy foods and parents to purchase the product. Do this for full margin items as well as sale items.

■ "Bag it Book Cover Day"

Encourage Kids to bring in a large paper and their favorite book. Ask the local Solid Waste Authority if they have an outreach program and if they would sponsor and help coordinate a back to school event teaching kids how to re-use paper by making really cool book covers all the while using re-useable items to decorate them with.

■ Children's Cooking Class

Have a kids' cooking class for parents and kids. Make it very hands on. Encourage kids to submit their favorite recipes and the selected winning entries will be included a cookbook that is available to print out FREE from your website. Make sure that you note that the recipe has to use ingredients from your store. Or have the cookbooks produced with the proceeds supporting local "healthy eating" projects at local schools. Be sure to use photos of the recipe and child who submits the recipes.

2. Grocery Department

■ Display idea: Educate parents that freezing aseptic juice packs is great way to add a "chill" to back to school lunch and snack boxes

■ Create an end cap educating parents how to create "nutritious snacks" for back to school. Display fun signs: "Kid Tasted and Approved," "Produce Kid's University" with facts about various fruits and veggies.

■ Make everything a "kid tested and approved" positive experience.

Be creative, add color, make it attractive and eye catching for kids. Hand out samples and find out which one kids like best. Consider holding a contest where they vote online—kids love the Internet. Or have them write an essay or draw a picture for a chance to win a great prize.

- Food Circles - the new food guide pyramid – get copies and have them at displays throughout the store. Read about it at http://www.betterfoodchoices.com/food_guide.php
- TIP: Start asking now for samples from vendors. During Back to School Month, distribute the items throughout the store to cross merchandise. I.E., Place cereal sample packets in the produce section next to the blueberries with a sign saying “that popping blueberries on your favorite cereal can add numerous vitamins and nutrients”. Or, place organic dried fruit snacks in the chip section with a sign saying “that adding a fruit snack to your day helps build health immune systems or perform better in school”.

3. Produce Department

- Create a kids’ “did you know” sign and educate kids with cool facts about different fruits and veggies.
- Invite a local organic farmer to lecture at your store (sponsored by your produce department, of course) in order to educate children why organic farming is so important. Ask the farmer to bring right off the farm samples in order to enjoy the true taste of “fresh.” Explain the meaning of organic and how the process of harvesting the land works. I.E., no use of pesticides, etc. Bring in samples of rich organic soil versus a depleted soil. Tell about earthworms. Hand out bookmarks with your store information on it... but make them very “kid” friendly.

4. Supplement Department

- Create an end cap and put some signs highlighting “Brain Food” and display vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids.
- According to the book “Better Food Choices”... Minerals are brain food. Vitamins are brain food. Essential Fatty Acids are brain food. They are found in whole-grains, fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts, seeds and other food groups.
- Create a demo day called “Vitamin Education Day for Parents”. During that day sample different types of children’s vitamins including powders, liquids, and chewables. Have handouts available about these products that you are sampling, as well as some great recipes for kids and wellness articles. You can also suggest books that encourage children’s wellness. Offer those books at a special savings with the purchase of a children’s nutritional supplement during that special day.

- TIP: Chamomile tea bags make a great bath for kids with achy bodies... help them relax after their long day

5. Website, Literature and education

- Promote all your events, have educational articles and fun games for kids and post any contests and have the children enter online (if possible)
- Gather children wellness articles from vendors and with permission see if they would allow articles to be posted on your website in .pdf format. Have signs in your reference department driving people to your website for those articles
- Create goody bags filled with back to school information for parents including snack samples and activity sheets for kids. Have parents sign up early to receive the bags and then use that data to invite them to any kids related events you will have at your store. Ask vendors to help sponsor the cost of the promotion and give them the opportunity to be promoted as a month long partner

6. Check-Out Area

- Put grab an go healthy choices for back to school – shelf stable
- Make mini bags of a trail mix that you blend and call it something like “munchie madness”
- Create a handout that lists your employee’s best pick for kids
- Have your list of kid-related activities created to notify kids about the events

Until next time, here’s wishing you a great day!

Debby

Debby link picks of the month:

www.kiwimagonline.com Kiwi Magazine Online

www.theorganicreport.com The O’Mama Report – Organic Trade Association

www.betterfoodchoices.com Recommended Reading: Better Food Choices

Copyright© 2000 by Debby Swoboda Marketing Solutions, Inc. All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

No part of this article may be used for the promotion of product or services without the express written consent of the author. The information in this article is intended for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of a health care provider. Nor is it to be used to diagnose, treat or cure any condition.