

A Basket of Profits

Offering creative gift baskets for your customers to purchase can provide a nice boost for your bottom line BY DIANE CHIASSON

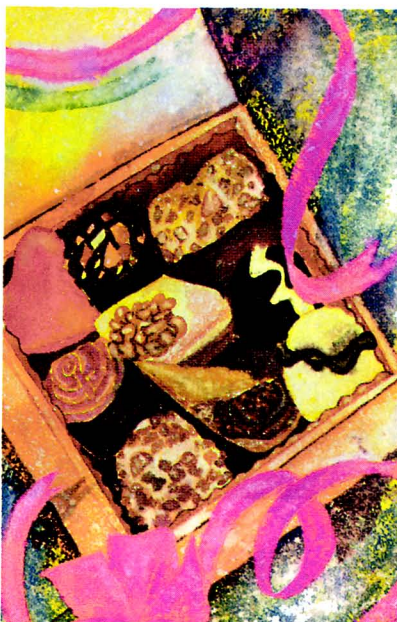
Gift baskets are a great way to bring extra profits into any operation. For many people, they're the ultimate convenience gift — they provide a simple solution for any gift-giving occasion. Whether for Christmas, birthdays, Thanksgiving, or any other special occasion, gift baskets can be adapted to fit any market. A restaurant operator can package sandwiches, salads and soft drinks in gift baskets and use them as a vehicle for their catering operation; a specialty food venue can package its foie gras and premium cheeses in a decorative basket to promote its products; and specialty coffee shop operators can prepare attractive baskets filled with teas, coffees, and other branded gift products to help boost sales.

Only one rule of thumb applies to gift baskets: be creative! People are generally willing to pay for something unique. Here are a few keys to successfully selling gift baskets:

Find interesting containers: The great thing about gift baskets is that you don't really have to use a basket; you can use any type of container you want. Recycle what you might have otherwise thrown out, including odd cups, saucers, plates, cans, trays, tins, pails or crates — practically anything in your operation could work — and use it as a container. Any of these items can be made to look expensive. If you're feeling creative, splash a bit of food-safe paint on these items to create a unique and colourful look.

Make it pretty: Be creative when filling the basket. You can stack your gifts, or use packing materials such as styro-foam peanuts to lift the gifts out of the basket and to give the container that "overflowing" look. Make your baskets bright and beautiful with colourful product labels and tissue. Complete the look with cellophane or shrink-wrap and match the basket colours with ribbons, hand-made bows and balloons. You can avoid having your baskets appear jumbled by always working towards a triangular-shaped design for optimum visual appeal.

Help your customers decide which basket to buy: Offer your customers pre-made baskets, but be sure to let them know that they can also choose any available items from your operation to create their own customized gift basket at a range of price points. Big, small, cute, romantic, healthy,



whimsical, traditional, or conservative — there's a gift basket for everybody. However, make sure that your entire staff is well-informed and can tell customers about every option available to them.

Consider it free advertising: The products inside the basket can be one of the best advertisements for your operation. So at the very least, make sure your establishment's name, telephone number and address are clearly marked somewhere on the basket. You can also use your corporate colours and decorate the basket with ribbons that have your company name imprinted on them. As well, you should take this opportunity to include items such as gift certificates, newsletters, brochures, coupons, business cards

and gift basket order sheets inside the baskets to encourage repeat business.

Point-of-sale presentation: Once you've packaged your products, display them in an attractive and appealing fashion. Inside the front counter and as part of back wall displays are great places to show off your pre-packaged items. Full, interesting displays are the most visually appealing.

Cleanliness is next to godliness: Be sure to keep your packaging and display area squeaky clean, neat and dust-free. Keep your display area tidy and uncluttered, and your products looking immaculate and fresh.

And a final piece of advice: Make sure that the lighting in and around your display focuses on the merchandise, not the floor. Also, don't forget to change your display often. If you're bored with your display, it's likely your customers are bored of it as well. ☛



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