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## Christmas is coming, but are you ready for it?



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Christmas is traditionally the time of the year where pharmacies invest heavily in stock hoping for a big sales boost in December. This anticipated rise in sales helps pharmacies through to the first part of 2009 which is generally quieter after the Safety Net period and festive season is over. It is a crucial time for your pharmacy – you may be well prepared when it comes to stock levels, merchandising and Christmas promotions – but do you have the staff to make it all happen? Getting the right amount of the right people can mean the difference between a good season and a phenomenal one for your pharmacy in 2008. Here are some tips to make sure your business soars this Christmas!

### Get the right staff

With sales going through the roof, it's important to find out early who is taking leave and for how long. You need your best staff over this busy period so try and negotiate with them to take leave at a mutually agreeable time wherever possible. To cover leave periods and increase your workforce to cope with increased business activity, make sure you get your locum staff organised ahead of time. When seeking casual or locum staff, it is important they are pharmacy experienced with a shared vision to making Christmas an exciting time for your pharmacy. You also need to ensure they come to your pharmacy ready to hit the ground running – with complete

screening, reference/registration (pharmacists) checking. Remember, you won't have time to train staff in December. By mid-November your staff should know your pharmacy, the products and their contribution to increasing sales. A real time and money saver would be to source your locum staff from a pharmacy specialist recruitment firm where all locum staff are contracted out to your pharmacy – therefore managing all payroll and 100 per cent of the risk for you. Get your locum bookings in early – you want to have the best locums/Christmas casuals, not just the available ones.

### Make work fun

With summer at its best, who wants to work? If you can create the right atmosphere in your pharmacy, Christmas can be an exciting time in the world of retail despite it being one of the busiest times in the year. To keep work fun try and make tasks interesting rather than repetitive or stressful. It is important to share the workload fairly, so no one staff member gets burnt out with increased business activity. It's a good idea to split up tasks into smaller assignments that are quicker to complete, giving employees a greater and quicker sense of achievement.

You can also motivate your staff through involving them in planning your Christmas promotional strategies. Targets set as a team are more likely to be achieved rather than targets

set by the owner and directed to the team.

### Christmas trade training

Are your staff at optimal performance levels to face irritable Christmas shoppers? Prepare a list of questions that staff may be faced with and make sure they have the answers they require. Staff need to be well prepared to handle questions referring to refund/exchange policies, products, store promotions and any other questions related to your seasonal promotional strategies.

Training your staff for Christmas trade also includes equipping them with stress management techniques – what do they do to remain cool, calm and collected in high-pressure times? Some pharmacies will have a comedy video running in their tea room where a staff member can take a quick five to 10 minute break to de-stress, or hire a masseuse for the day for mini massages to re-energise staff (customers love it too!). It's essential that you take care of your staff so they can in turn take care of your customers.

### Sales, sales, sales

You have invested thousands of dollars in stock – but are your products being sold to maximum potential? Are your staff trained to approach your customers rather than wait to be approached? Encourage your team to greet customers with Christmas cheer, asking them open-ended questions. Now is the time to show off

up-selling and cross-selling techniques – you can have the most effective Christmas sales strategies in place but unless they're communicated to staff that have had the training to do so, they are useless.

### Recognise, reward and rest!

With so much happening in the lead up to Christmas, it's important your team isn't overworked to the point of exhaustion. You need to keep energy levels up, enabling you to push over stock as quickly as possible. Your team may also feel the pressure from the hectic festive season so, remember that if staff are overloaded with work, this can only be short term followed by recognition, reward and rest!

Post Christmas, many staff members may quickly become de-motivated. This is the perfect time for you to take your team out for dinner and revisit your goals and strategies in place for the new year. Question and brainstorm why some strategies worked and others didn't. Ensure you make a special effort to recognise and reward everyone's achievements over the Christmas period – an appreciated and valued team will always be more productive and profitable!

Christmas is that one time each year when your pharmacy can attract customers who would ordinarily walk past without the blink of an eye, so here is your chance to maximise sales and increase your customer base for 2009. **R**