



By Anthony Raissen

## Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall: Is Your Product Seasonal?

**W**e live our lives around the four seasons and a number of special holidays. Each one brings with it a unique need for products and services specific to that season or holiday. Do you have a product that has “seasonal appeal”? Do you have a product that you can package and promote around a seasonal theme?

You need only to walk down the aisles of your local stores to see just how creative and promotion-driven manufacturers, as well as retailers, have become in an ever-increasing effort to capitalize on the seasonality and or calendar event promotions of products.

Do you walk down the aisle and see this as an opportunity for your product, or do you get jaded at how “commercial” the system has become? Hopefully you can see through the red and green of the Christmas decorations, or pink and white of the Valentine’s Day hearts. These colors all add up to tons of *green!*

I was recently approached by a prospective client who has a great “beach product.” The client wanted me to help him create a marketing and advertising plan for the summer of 2008. At first I thought he was joking, but soon realized that what we often take for granted — our knowledge of how retailers plan and think — is not even considered by most entrepreneurs or manufacturers. The problem is that retailers typically review “beach items” in the fall for the following year.

Still, once your product gets on schedule, one great advantage that you have with a seasonal products is that retailers like seasonal promotions and you have the ability to use great promotional vehicles like floor stands, power wings, pallet promotions, displays, etc.

These promotional vehicles help you create extra hype around your product, which in turn leads to extra sales. One thing you do need to consider with seasonal products is that at the end of the season the retailer will return the unsold merchandise to



you. You need to plan for this return at the operational level, as well as at the financial level.

Many of the points addressed in the box below apply whether or not you have a seasonal product. The issue is that while you may be waiting to perfect your product, there is a lot you can do to give yourself the ability to go to market as soon as the product is ready,

rather than waiting a year before realizing your dream. ■

**H**ere are a few steps you, as an entrepreneur, can take to get ahead of the curve and ensure you don’t have to miss an entire year before taking your product to retail:

- » Familiarize yourself with trade shows and retailer schedules as early as possible — there is no excuse for missing an important show or deadline.
- » Create your marketing and advertising plans well ahead of any such shows or retail presentations — the first question you will be asked is, “What are your marketing and advertising plans and budgets?”
- » Create mock-ups and prototypes of products, as well as packaging and displays, even if you are not 100-percent sure of what the final product and packaging will look like. In many cases, a prototype and mock-up packaging will be sufficient to get a retailer excited enough with your product to give you the time to get to final product and packaging.
- » Have a sales force and broker network in place ahead of time. This will let you hit the ground running when you are ready to proceed. Apart from being proactive, this gives the retailer a sense of comfort that you know what you are doing and are prepared and able to move forward when the time is right.
- » Give the company, if you are working with a contract manufacturer, a heads up as to when you will need your product. Manufacturers need to order raw materials and allocate production time and staffing ahead of time. Giving them advance notice of when you anticipate going into production will ensure that your products are on the correct production schedule.
- » Get set up with UPC numbers (barcodes). This is not a very time intensive process, however you will need UPC numbers on your retail packaging and shipping cartons. The application is available online and the Web site is user friendly. For more info go to [www.gs1us.org](http://www.gs1us.org).
- » Take care of legal issues, such as sales permits and business licenses.

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