



(Left) With games and toys, unique is best. Offer distinctive items, such as these themed playing cards from Inkstone Design Inc., leaving trends and fads to larger retailers. (Below) Paula Taylor of the Louisiana Art and Science Museum notes that displays, such as this one from Earth Discovery, should be inviting.

most other museums have a similar sales philosophy.”

Draw attention with catchy displays

Grabbing and holding the attention of games and toys’ target audience is key to selling these products. Provide interactive displays to grab children’s attention, and engage parents with a welcoming atmosphere. As Paula Taylor, museum store manager at the Louisiana Art and Science Museum in Baton Rouge says, “Display is key!” when it comes to games and toys.

Pariente advises stores to maintain an “environment that is pleasing to the eye and pleasing to the senses. Create an ambiance that makes them want to stay in your store. The longer they stay, the more they will buy.”

Keeping displays fresh is also important. Simply by relocating products, they appear new and continue to generate interest. “Rotating inventory is essential, especially if you rely on local traffic,” says Kathleen Herlihy-Paoli, president of Inkstone Design Inc. in Missoula, MT. “The local stores that I like to visit (and shop in) are very good at making the merchandise appear fresh and new by moving it around and rearranging, so that the store seems a bit different every time I go in.”

Decker also has found that subtleties such as lighting and placement play a large role in sales. “Having a store that is visually interesting will increase sales regardless of the merchandise available. Lighting also is very important,” she says. “Last year we invested in new

Profitable Playtime

Engage customers with games and toys

By Victoria Carroll Keck

Encouraging museum store customers to have fun while providing them with education is what museums are all about. Games and toys present visitors with interesting, educational products to take home, extending their museum visit. Offering engaging, enjoyable products to museum store customers gives them a tangible, fun reminder of their time at the museum while helping your museum store’s bottom line.

Unique sells

Museum store customers look for one-of-a-kind products that can’t be found anywhere else, and games and toys are no exception. Many stores have found success leaving trendy toys to big retailers, instead focusing on more distinctive, educational items. “We have found that the toys that sell best in the museum stores are items that are uniquely sold there and cannot be found in discount chains like a Target or Walmart,” says Ramona Pariente, president of Safari Ltd., Miami Garden, FL.

Kendra Decker, gallery and museum store manager at the Tucson Children’s Museum in Arizona says, “As a museum store, we try to stay away from trends and

fads in the toy market.” Not only does she want to offer more unique items, she also is approaching stock from a practical standpoint. “We don’t want to be stuck with excess inventory when the fad fades, and because we don’t order large quantities, we usually don’t get priority shipping.” Pricing is another factor to consider. Games and toys that fall within a lower price range sell best. Several museum stores and vendors listed their most successful games and toys as selling for between \$4.95 and \$9.99 – the “magic” price range.

Decker also notes she’s noticed customers are looking for more environmentally friendly products, mirroring a growing movement. “In museum stores I am seeing a trend of ‘green’ toys,” she says. “I think visitors expect us to carry products that are environmentally friendly, fun and educational, and not mass-market available. This has been the focus in my store and I think



lighting for the store and right away noticed an increase in sales.”

Pariente has found that “low-focused lighting rather than harsh fluorescent enhances the product. Ambient music also helps create the mood.”

Get hands-on

Games and toys are interactive products, and museum stores should encourage participation with them. At the Louisiana Art and Science Museum, “we make a point to interact with the kids as they shop and demonstrate how things work,” says Taylor. This technique is extremely effective with sales, even with

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products whose retail price is higher. “We carry a set of blocks in our store that retail between \$45 for a small set and \$60 for a large set,” says Decker. “We had opened a sample box and left them on our display table. A few weeks went

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PLAYTIME

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Encouraging hands-on interaction with games and toys, such as these Fractiles, helps boost sales.

by without any sales. One Saturday morning a staff person sat at the table and built one of the structures. We sold three sets that day!"

A knowledgeable sales member who is available to engage the customer is another effective sales tool. "Having an associate on hand to suggest and explain can help," says Tim Murray, retail buyer, Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga. This is more effective than simply having the product out, he says, because "hands-on displays do not hold up long with groups and hundreds of little hands."

For optimal sales of games and toys, offer unique and engaging products, create a welcoming environment that is constantly fresh and exciting, and captivate customers with hands-on interaction with products. **M**

For information about advertising in MSA's publications, visit www.MuseumStoreAssociation.org to download an entry form, or contact Tamara Garlett at Skies America Publishing (503) 520-1955 x675 or tamarag@skies.com.

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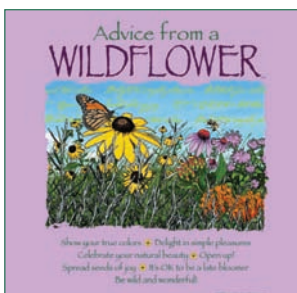
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