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Features

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A Rewarding Experience

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With all the marketing messages customers receive on a daily basis, it's hard to cut through the chatter to get your message out there. How do you communicate with customers you know love shopping at your store? One way to keep in touch with them is through a customized app for your store(s). During Cultivate I stopped at the Sunrise Marketing booth and talked to Kurt Fromherz, who I've known for more than 20 years now. He mentioned the newer app his company helped Stauffers of Kissel Hill in Pennsylvania launch for their garden and home division, and that they already had more than 18,000 members. That stopped me in my tracks.

Here's the sign at the register: The front is for the customer to check in, and the back is for the cashier to

navigate redemption and questions.

A couple of weeks later we jumped on a Zoom call with the marketing team from Stauffers and they gave me the rundown—someone from the company had stopped at Kurt's booth the year before at Cultivate when he told them about the app. They saw the potential because they didn't have a loyalty program in place for the garden side yet (they also have grocery division and had a separate program there), so this app could be the impetus for a loyalty program. They decided to not only jump on board with the idea, but to have it ready by November for the holiday push. Ambitious? Yes. Doable? Also yes, though a little tricky.

"It's very easy to understand and navigate, not only from our point of view of maintaining this app, but also from the public's point of view," said Sheena Ashley, assistant director of marketing and branding. "The learning curve was more so for our in-store team members to really just have a brand new rewards program—how are our customers are going to redeem these coupons and rewards? And what does that mean for them? What are the benefits?"

"That was pretty exciting on our end to be able to reach out to our customers in that respect."

Setting It Up

Once they decided to get started, it was a simple one-time fee for setup and a monthly charge for maintenance and

continued services. The marketing team at Stauffers worked with Kurt and app developer Eddy Ahmed on a few key aspects:

- How they were going to get customers signed up
- What kind of content they were going to put on it
- What they would offer as a first-time promotion and on an on-going basis
- How they were going to get their team members on board to make it a success

The Stauffers of Kissel Hill Home & Garden App was born, and to begin with, customers who signed up received a \$5 off \$25 purchase coupon. The goal was to make sign-up as easy as possible, so they created double-sided signs that sat at checkout locations. The sign facing the customer showed the promotion and a QR code to scan to download the app, check in and receive the reward. The back of the sign helps the cashier explain the program and step-by-step instructions for the coupon redemption process.

Since they could track sign-ups and check-ins by store, the marketing team set up a contest with the seven locations to see who could sign up the most customers. A couple of the stores really excelled here, said Debi Drescher, director of marketing and branding at Stauffers of Kissel Hill.

“We took some of their best practices and implemented them at the other stores,” she said. “And so by spring, everyone was starting to get engaged and understand what they needed to do—it was a very cool thing.”

The marketing team opted to set it up in a tiered membership status, so once customers check in after an in-store purchase they accumulate points. They’re allowed one check in per day, and their reward coupon, when they earn one, is good toward their next purchase. Reward coupons do not expire. Customers can be a Silver, Gold, Platinum or Diamond member depending on their number of check ins.



Deciding On Content

Stauffers has a rolling screen on their app filled with content and they like to keep it as fresh as they can.

One creative store location mounted a promotional sign to every cart with a QR code to download the app. That’s now a best practice throughout all the stores.

“There’s an unlimited amount of imagery and capabilities we could put on this app,” Sheena said. “The way that we have it going, we schedule out certain things—it’s very easy to schedule.”

They can keep it fresh by showcasing new products and promotions, as well as pushing visitors to blog posts with more information on the website. Of course, there are the essentials, too, like store locations, store hours, emails and phone numbers.

What’s great about the in-app offers is they’re all trackable, giving the marketing team valuable data that helps them make decisions.

“We meet weekly with our internal teams to push out certain sales within our garden centers. One of the agenda items is for the next upcoming weeks what sort of app deals or coupons would you like to add to the app?” Sheena noted.

It's also a tool they use to create synergies with their e-commerce, highlighting product lines on the app that customers can click through and order online. That will take them to the website, where they'll complete the transaction.

"That's another opportunity for them to purchase right away," Sheena added. "Online shopping has really grown in the past few years. So, again, this is just another way for us to increase those sales."

Social media plays a role, too, with YouTube Reel links on the app pushing customers to the YouTube channel.

"So you can see if we spend, you know, X amount of hours filming a Reel, is that content hitting our customers? Is that what they're interested in?" Sheena said. "You can definitely see that reflected on the app on the back end."

Another key aspect is push notifications and frequency. Those drive customer traffic and, ultimately, sales, and the goal is to make sure they stay relevant .

"It's usually for them to get something like an event notification, a coupon that's available or 'last days' to create the urgency," Debi said. "That's our three main push notifications."



Making It a Success

The challenge with adopting any new technology is getting everyone, from team members to customers, on board. With their internal contest, they were able to identify some key best practices adopted by a few stores that rolled out to the rest, like in-store signage at the shelf level if there was a coupon on the app for that particular product and signs in the carts with a QR code to sign up for the app.

Examples of in-app content include new products and education.

Helping cashiers work through coupon redemption is an ongoing education process, particularly since that position can be more seasonal. There are also the typical challenges with technology, i.e. helping customers download it and access their rewards. By and large, though, the app doesn't add a lot more time to the workload—about two hours a week to manage content and about another hour to manage other issues related to the app.

In return, they receive actionable data on what content customers are engaging with, what rewards they're redeeming, where they're checking in and more. Debi and Sheena both were excited about what they've seen so far and the potential moving forward.

"Kurt and Eddy have been amazing to work with; the app's been very successful for us and we've given them continual feedback as we went through this process," Debi said. "Some of the things they were able to modify for us right from the get-go; some of things they put in their pocket and are working toward change and making it better.

"All in all, I think that it's been a great experience for us and we're glad we did this." **GP**