

Great Graduation Sales....Despite the Economy!

By: Helen Taylor, National Sales Manager, Church Hill Classics



Graduation season is almost upon us and now is the time to start merchandising graduation in your store. Receiving a college diploma is an undisputed milestone and even a sluggish economy cannot halt the momentum and excitement of this accomplishment!

Graduation is a key event in a person's life equaled only by events such as a wedding or having a baby, as you make plans for your store, make sure you capitalize on the significance of graduation. Capture sales to the families of excited graduates looking to buy gifts in recognition of the hard work, achievement, and college tuition already paid out.

While your instinct may be to cut back inventory on graduation products such as diploma frames, announcements, and other graduation items due to the fear of a slowing economy, remember this is a one-time event. Graduation products are often an impulse purchase and not having adequate stock on-hand will result in lost sales...definitely not what you want in a tough economy! Resist the temptation to save in the short-term by cutting your graduation mailings. The key to success is reaching your prime target—parents—well ahead of graduation, when they are beginning to think about graduation gifts and the big event. Your advance mailings and efforts will ensure you make some early sales (great for cash flow!)

To maximize sales, capture the excitement in months leading up to graduation by using your store's resources to set the tone. Marketing & merchandising doesn't necessarily mean spending oodles of money, it just takes some advanced planning and creativity. Below are some ideas for preparing your store for the big day, and getting the word out without spending any money:

PRIOR TO GRADUATION

- ◆ Send out an email blast to students or families of graduates prior to graduation detailing graduation products offered through the store and any special discounts or events going on during graduation.
- ◆ Make sure your store website has all your graduation products posted in an easy to find category such as 'Graduation Gifts' or 'Diploma Frames'. Feature a home page link on your website directly to graduation products in the months leading up to and after graduation. Having an e-commerce store website is really important. If your store doesn't have a website or doesn't have e-commerce functionality, see if your graduation vendors have programs available to sell products on your behalf on their website providing you a good commission rate. (Warning: evaluate programs carefully to make sure you are getting the best commission rate - not all programs are created equal!)



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- ◆ Set-up a graduation center in your bookstore to showcase graduation products and gift suggestions. Decorate with balloons, “congratulations” banner, a mannequin in a cap and gown, etc. Put out diploma frame, class ring, and announcement brochures with order forms as part of the display that customers can take.
- ◆ Build a Facebook page for your store – this is a great way to interact with students! Take a look at Middlebury College Bookstore’s Facebook page for a great example. This tool will serve you well at graduation, and improve communication with students all year long too. You can probably find an enthusiastic student to do the legwork setting it up.



- ◆ Check into advertising your store on campus radio. Some campus radio stations will advertise for free if you are an on-campus store. This is perfect for promoting events such as grad fairs.

ON GRADUATION DAY

- ◆ Have a second location on a table outside the bookstore, or at the location of graduation if possible, to sell graduation products. Parents often arrive very early to graduation to secure seats and have time to wander around prior to and right after the ceremony.

Certified Collegiate Retailer (CCR)

National Association of College Stores Inc. (NACS)
 Certified Collegiate Retailer (CCR) Exam
 is being offered

Monday, March 2, 2009
 At the Super Regional Meeting & Buying Show
 Mohegan Sun - Uncasville, CT

CCR Exam

8:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Distinguish yourself from the rest, become a Certified Collegiate Retailer! A Certified Collegiate Retailer (CCR) designation demonstrates that you possess the necessary knowledge to successfully manage a college store, and will further enhance your credibility. Apply for the CCR certification, prepare for the CCR examination, and then sit for the exam at this location; with a passing score you will get the distinction you deserve. For more information go to: <http://www.nacs.org/public/certification>

Examination fee:

\$200 (NACS members)

\$400 (nonmembers)