

# Creating a Christmas catalogue that really sells

By Ian Simpson

It's the most wonderful time of the year, so make your catalogue extra-special too

**I**t seems strange writing a piece about Christmas when the sun is shining and we are in the middle of one of the hottest spells for years. But I should know better, I have recently received my first Christmas-themed catalogue; yes the end of May and I am being told to buy Christmas cards.

Christmas is the most consumer-focused time of the year and a massively important sales period, with some multichannel retailers netting more than 90 percent of their turnover in the six to eight weeks prior to Christmas. It is an increasingly hard fight for your customer's pound and from September onwards we will be seeing a regular flow of catalogues through the letterbox.

Getting your Christmas catalogue to work harder, at a particularly competitive selling period, is not simply a case of tearing up the rulebook and creating something totally out of kilter with your usual mailings. Similarly, if you just create a "Christmas-ised" version of your regular product offering, it won't work as hard as it could do. It is important to show your customers you recognise it is a special time of year and you have been working hard to bring some extra-special products. But whatever you do, it has to be in line with your brand and something your prospective customers can identify and engage with.

## Where do you start?

Without doubt, the easiest way to sell product is to tap into an emotion. I learned a long time ago that selling is rational; buying is emotional. A salesperson will always present a product in the most rational way possible; he will show you features, benefits, buying options, available versions, colours and everything else you need to make your choice. And you know that choice is never going to be rational.

A catalogue works in the same way and has to function as both a sales and a marketing tool that promotes the company's brand values. At Christmas it has to work very hard to pull both these strings together, wrap them around a prospective purchaser's emotions and give a big tug!

## It's all about emotions...

One of the most powerful emotions at Christmas is guilt (tongue in cheek, of course!). Whatever you have done throughout the year, this is the time when you can make amends. You didn't call mum enough, you feel bad about taking dad for granted, you haven't spent enough time with the kids, granny misses seeing you, and yes, you are getting grumpier. So choosing the right gift, if done properly, is a complex process. It is also a process that makes us feel good: about ourselves, our friends, our family and everything we care about. The emotional drive is to give the family, friends or pets a really great gift that shows we care about them and that we also care about the choice of gift.

I believe the best way to sell with a catalogue at Christmas is to do what you have doing all year round—but better. You create a catalogue that personifies your brand, shouts about the things that make Christmas special, is packed with really special products, suggests great ideas for gifts, but above all makes it easy for the customer to buy from and gives them great solutions. By doing this you are selling the greatest benefit of all—the benefit of buying from you.



## Some practical tips

So how does this turn into practical tips, hints and ideas? Well I think we have to start with the obvious, the cover. It has to be festive and brand-led. It goes without saying that it has to

shout about your catalogue's contents. A festive message and feel are vital but there has to be some element of expectation—just as there is when opening a parcel on Christmas Day.

Keeping brand consistency is vital and I have illustrated this year's William Powell Spring cover along with the previous year's Christmas edition (on page 16). Both evoke feelings of the relevant season, but the brand proposition is retained and it is quite clear where the catalogue has come from. The masthead is consistent and the overall cover design sits well within the brand guidelines, but there is no mistaking that this is a Christmas selection. It is fairly restrained and conveys a quality feel so important to this particular target audience. It also highlights a selection of products that are suitable as gifts. So the message is: you know us, you know what we do and we have been thinking of ways to help you share Christmas amongst your family and friends.



On the other hand, Northern Parrots is far more fun-orientated. Parrots are wonderful creatures, often brightly coloured, full of mischief and much beloved by their owners. The cover picture summed up the emotions we all tend to feel at Christmas, even to the kiss under the mistletoe. Again it features products no parrot could resist, especially the cutesie Santa piñata—no doubt happily torn to shreds by Boxing Day!

The important thing is that these two approaches are entirely consistent with customers' expectations; there are no surprises. And they are at the opposite end of the creative scale; William Powell would not sit comfortably with the tinsel and mistletoe approach, but Northern Parrots has a fun element in the products and subject. This shines through and targets the emotions of the parrot owner.

Also consider product guides, I have illustrated a simple approach (left) that



highlights gifts for various members of the family. This does two things: navigates customers to key products and demonstrates that you are working with them to make their Christmas shopping easier. (More on gift centres on page 19.)

## Wrapping up

Tap into emotion and connect with your readers, do what you have been doing all year round but excel at Christmas, highlight great gift ideas and show that you are working with your customers, keep the brand consistent. I trust this helps and that you all enjoy an exceptional Christmas.

Ian Simpson is managing director at design, print and marketing company Catalogues 4 Business.

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