



The key ingredients in Thanksgiving weekend marketing; Relevance and creativity

By Lindsay Stein

Thanksgiving. Black Friday. Small Business Saturday. Cyber Monday. Giving Tuesday. With such a crowded start to the holiday shopping season, brands need to be creative and relevant to break through, say marcomms experts.

The five days after Thanksgiving are ripe for marketers looking to get the attention of both the media and consumers, says Rich Goldblatt, SVP of consumer branding at M Booth.

To build the most buzz, brands should do more than offer discounts or coupons – they should figure out unique ways to engage their audiences. M Booth client Dyson, for example, is having a Black Friday sale at major retailers, but also creating "outdoor pods" in Chicago featuring its AM05 Heater, where consumers can stay warm while waiting to get into stores, Goldblatt explains.

"[Dyson is] taking its product and making it the hero of Black Friday by rescuing shoppers from the cold," he states. "It's a great way to get visibility because it's not just slapping your name on something or sponsoring coffee – it's showing the product at work."

Thanksgiving, of course, is the biggest meal of the year for many Americans. To help customers burn off the calories they gained during the family meal, Gold's Gym has gotten in on Black Friday in an out-of-the-box way since 2008 with its Trim the Fat Friday program. The initiative allows members and non-members alike to go to the gym for free the day after Thanksgiving.

Caitlin Maddox, communications manager at Gold's, says it made sense for the brand to take advantage of Black Friday because people consume 4,500 calories on average on Thanksgiving – and the next day, they feel bad about it. So the chain helps them work off their guilt at its facilities around the country.

This year, Gold's is continuing its partnership with celebrity Food Network chef Robert Irvine, adding three healthy side-dish recipes to the Trim the Fat Friday page on GoldsGym.com. The brand is also promoting both new and old healthy recipes to consumers on its social media platforms, says Maddox.

She adds that the program has worked because it's "unexpected and different," offering more than just a one-day sale.

Another reason to go beyond reducing prices this holiday season is that 31.6% of consumers, up 2% from 2013, say they are [skeptical of discounts](#) and are planning to consider all deals before committing to a store, according to the National Retail Federation.

However, for American Express' Small Business Saturday, which encourages consumers to shop locally, it makes sense to keep deals and discounts at the center of an effort. With the program entering its fourth year, AmEx wants to keep buyers intrigued, so it will extend the deals through Small Business Saturday Night. M Booth has supported Small Business Saturday since it launched in 2010.

"Everyone knows Small Business Saturday," says Goldblatt. "You have to keep feeding it for it to stay alive and grow."

Small Business Saturday Night will launch in three markets – Chicago, New York, and San Francisco – and participating retailers will give shoppers incentives such as cocktails and entertainment.

General Motors' Chevrolet brand is getting involved with Small Business Saturday with an initiative for its fleet dealers, which sell vehicles to commercial businesses, says Jamie Barbour, Chevrolet digital, site, and social advertising manager.

In addition to traditional and digital ads and some paid promotions on Twitter, Chevy will use social media to engage fans on days from Black Friday and Small Business Saturday to National Donut Day (June 5) and Electronic Greeting Card Day (November 17).

Barbour says the brand listens to conversations on social media first, and then figures out ways for the brand to get involved authentically in the discussion. She advises companies that want to leverage a hot topic or major holiday on social platforms to initially do research to see what their fans care about the most.

When it comes to holiday marketing and PR campaigns, Barbour adds that brands can be equally successful with a large, expensive effort or a small initiative involving a solid piece of social content.

Jason Winocour, partner at Hunter Public Relations, contends that before brands decide what Thanksgiving-season day to leverage, they need to "be careful not to do a holiday PR or marketing activation because it seems like the right thing to do."

He adds that there should be connections among the brand, the holiday, and the campaign, and that companies can also generate buzz through pre-, during, and post-holiday plans.

Hunter's Barefoot Wine and Bubbly client recently sponsored the online video series Prank it FWD on Break.com, with the first short airing on Monday. The "She's Got It Maid" episode had a "positive, life changing" twist just in time for the holidays, giving the maid a new home, said Winocour.

New episodes aired online through Tuesday, and Barefoot is continuing to promote the content on its own social channels.

Winocour adds that if a brand does not want to get involved with Thanksgiving-season shopping madness, another option is to tap into holidays celebrated by different demographics, such as Día de los Reyes, or The Day of Kings, on January 6 to engage Hispanic consumers.