

COLUMNS

## Turning holiday slowdown into treasure

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Emily Adams

By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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"City sidewalks, busy sidewalks, dressed in holiday style as the shoppers rush home with their treasures."

Holiday tunes and Christmas carols are pumped through the speakers of retail stores across the country in December. And the lyrics speak the truth the holiday season is a time for shopping for treasures and gifts for all the people you love.

But for service-based businesses, the holiday season can mean a winter slowdown, as the normally steady stream of customers reduces to a trickle.

The problem is generally that a service business usually pulls from the same pool of potential customers as the booming holiday retail businesses.

Families only have a certain amount of disposable income. Every paycheck is like a pie once you take out the piece for the mortgage, the electric bill, the groceries and all other monthly expenses, the piece that is left is the disposable income. And how they slice that piece is up to their discretion.

Competition for that piece is stiff, especially during the holidays. Your small business is up against all other small businesses not just your competitor down the street or the other stores in your industry to win a slice of that pie.

During this time of year, most of this disposable income is earmarked for holiday gifts. This might mean online shopping, big box stores, or local boutiques, but it rarely means an oil change or visit to the chiropractor.

How can service based businesses take a slice of the pie that usually favors retail during holiday shopping?

Give the gift of experience

Not all gifts can be wrapped in a bow to fit perfectly under the tree. This year, try promoting your service as a unique gift.

Massages, play tickets, a nice meal out, painting classes get creative and turn your service into an opportunity to give a memorable gift.

The message is key. No one wants to give a gift that will not be appreciated, especially during the holidays. You not only have to convey the value of your service, but specify why they should care about receiving the service. The value must be clear enough that they can't help but want to share it with others.

## Build value

The groundwork can be laid during the rest of the year, so by the time December arrives you have already established the value of your service now you just need to remind them.

Use the features, benefits, and value model every time you market your service. People do not want to know only what you do, they also need to see why it matters to them and how it will improve their life.

It is not about selling, it is about educating. In your marketing messages, you need to be teaching the customer the value of your service. Not just what it is or what it does, but why it matters.

## Generate cheer and excitement

The holiday season is full of cheer. When families are making those tough choices about how to spend their limited budgets, especially during this time of year, they want to choose something they can feel excited about.

Families have to make tough choices: Do I want to get new tires, or braces for my child, or upgrade my stereo, or take an extra ski trip this winter?

Everything is optional. They could put it off for another month, or choose to invest in something more fun, something with immediate gratification.

Families' decision, especially during the holiday season, will be based on which option brings them the most joy. They will choose something that makes them cheer. They will choose the thing with the most value.

To claim a piece of the pie, you need to do the best job educating them about your service and getting them excited. They have to want to share a slice. And you can earn it with the right message.

*Emily Adams is content manager at [Automated Marketing Group](#), Littleton, CO. Reach her at [emily.adams@longtermfix.com](mailto:emily.adams@longtermfix.com).*