

Five Reasons to Celebrate ‘Fifth Season’

Novelty and seasonal items are not just about the four major holidays anymore By Renée M. Covino

MOVE OVER MAJOR HOLIDAYS, the micros are moving in.

Novelty and seasonal items, including confections, greeting cards and gift cards, are very popular around the four major holidays of Valentine’s Day, Halloween, Christmas and Easter. However, more retailers — convenience stores included — are moving into “fifth season” or “micro” occasions such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and Super Bowl.

“Retail seasons have gotten longer, major holidays are overlapping, and shoppers are continuously finding ‘mini’ moments in their lives to enjoy each holiday,” said Jim Dodge, vice president of convenience at Mars Wrigley Confectionery U.S., maker of novelty and limited-edition seasonal confectionery items.

This has given way to more micro season moments and thus, more opportunities for retailers’ merchandising and marketing plans.

Consider these five fifth-season ideas when looking to capitalize on the latest and greatest in general merchandise:

1. Be Seen & Heard

Fifth-season merchandising opens itself up to more available space. Convenience store retailers who put a bigger focus on micro occasions will come to realize that retail space is a lot less crowded at other times of the year vs. during the winter holidays, according to Jaclyn Nix, a retail industry consultant and vice president of sales at MyWebGrocer.

Consumers are more likely to notice fifth-season merchandising, too, because it comes at a time when they’re not bombarded by typical holiday messaging.

2. Summer: A Three-Way Window of Opportunity

Convenience stores can capitalize on the three key summer holidays: Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day, utilizing general merchandise endcap and counter displays.

“There’s plenty of time [during the summer season] to drive purchase and create a shift in buying behavior,” Nix told *Convenience Store News*.

Plus, summertime is when consumers are shopping for a crowd, so retailers should consider price promotions for bulk buys. Think sunglasses, sunscreen and even pool toys/drink floats.

And speaking of sunglasses, retailers looking to become serious general merchandise players must realize that they have to keep their impulse-item displays, such as sunglass racks, just as in stock as they do their beverage coolers.

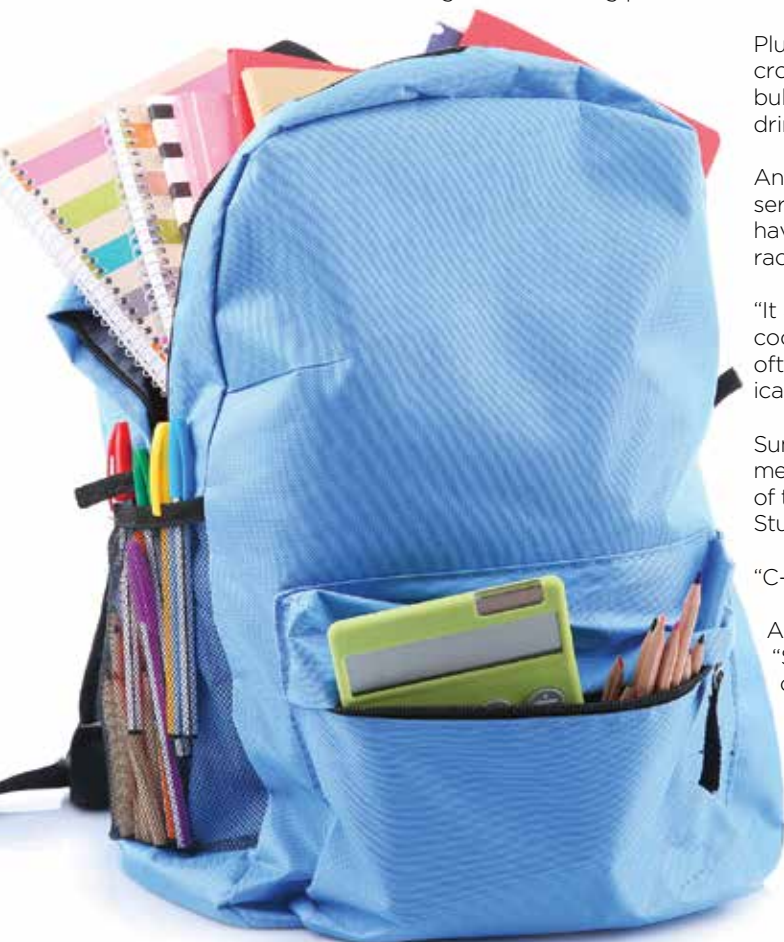
“It always amazes me how stores understand to keep the coolers full, but high-profit seasonal impulse items they often forget about,” said Al Underwood, president of American Style Sunglasses.

Summertime as a general marketing theme can span summer fun, travel, tailgating, family fires — these are all symbolic of the season, family life and American values, noted Don Stuart, managing director at Cadent Consulting Group.

“C-stores can leverage them all,” he advised.

Additionally, this works for springtime and the theme of “Spring Fling,” whereby c-stores can feature collectible cards, spinning tops or whatever the latest trending general merchandise item is to take consumers out of their winter doldrums. Spring is not just about Easter.

As for when retailers should start merchandising seasonal moments like summer and spring, Dodge suggests weeks in advance. For summer, “shoppers want to see merchandise in stores beginning in early May, and



the majority want it to run through Labor Day," he stated.

3. School Days

The two micro occasions of Back to School in September and Back From Holiday Break in January are critical, according to Stuart, as these can be key last-minute merchandising opportunities for stock-up and incremental purchases.

"Backpacks, crayons and stationery, as well as snacks for school lunch boxes, are all essentials that can be last-minute pickups at c-stores," Stuart pointed out.

And the opportunity isn't limited just to the days leading up to these occasions. "These are all things kids notice they've forgotten after the first few days of school have gone by," he added. "These are great opportunities for quick fill-ins and emergencies."

4. The National Day Calendar

Did you know National Yo-Yo Day is June 6? How about National Sunglasses Day on June 27? The National Day Calendar (nationaldaycalendar.com) can become the fifth-season bible for a retailer looking to capitalize on odd holidays to sell more general merchandise.

Kathy Thomas, a retail consultant and owner of a margarita mix company, Ready Ritas, discovered National Tequila Day (July 24) and National Margarita Day (Feb. 22) on the National Day Calendar to promote her product. She also uses color as a marketing tool as she sells colored salts in on-the-go plastic pouches that can be transported to any event.

"We sell traditional lime-flavored margarita mix in fun team- and holiday-inspired colors. We have CrimsonRitas, BlueRitas, RedRitas, MaroonRitas, BurntOrangeRitas, PurpleRitas and a classic light-green color mix," she explained. "As a small-business owner, I depend on promotions around all holidays to encourage purchase. During tailgate season, I promote team colors. For Fourth of July, I promote red and blue mix and the complementary salt to go with it. For Mardis Gras, I feature purple salt on a glass full of green mix."

Stuart agrees there's a lot more fifth-season opportunities than retailers realize.

"It seems almost any day is a big day that has a named event after it. Some have historical significance such as Flag Day, but some are truly frivolous such as Peach Day or Watermelon Day," he said. "But these are all days that creative operators can make something out of."

Still, he's not suggesting c-stores do this every day. "There's probably one a week that can be really special to make a store pop — to differentiate it, to create some traffic and to generate incremental sales with unique merchandising."

5. Confectionery as a Backdrop

Fifth season isn't limited to general merchandise. Dodge recommends retailers mix major and mini season moments throughout the year using confectionery as a backdrop.



Mardi Gras and National Margarita Day are two "fifth-season" occasions c-store operators could use as marketing opportunities.

"Millennial shoppers are looking for stronger emotional connections. One way they can achieve this is through year-round affordable gift-giving," he said, pointing to candy.

Confectionery company CandyRific likewise sees fifth season as bringing "all new and fresh opportunities in the retail environment," said Clark Taylor, vice president of sales.

CandyRific has begun to build new platforms to help retailers grow this fringe promotion area. For example, the company recently worked with several major retailers to create Super Bowl promotions around snacking and chocolate candy.

"This has involved some of our toys, as well as promotion-specific snacking bowls for their candy and party events," Taylor relayed.

Other fifth-season opportunities that CandyRific has capitalized on are license releases, such as Star Wars in May. Cinco de Mayo is also a focus of the company. "We are creating specific packaging graphics to tie into these new opportunities," he said.

Taylor cautions retailers, though, to be mindful of the merchandising difference between a major holiday and a mini one; the latter is exactly as it sounds: smaller and shorter.

"These opportunities do not have long promotion windows associated with them, so the presentation of the items and the quantities purchased must be very tight on the timing," he advised. "Also, you need smaller case packs for quicker turns of stock." **CSN**