

beauty



Almar: Hot Items, Short Lead Times

NEW YORK — Retailers are faced with a conundrum this holiday season. Worried about shoppers' moods, they want to keep inventories tight to cut back on excess merchandise left over to be marked down.

At the same time, buyers have noticed an uptick in interest in cosmetics — especially trend nail colors. That leads them to stock shelves with hot promotions with alacrity.

The confluence of these two trends benefits Almar Sales Company, which for more than 45 years has been a go-to firm for sales, marketing and merchandising in the fashion hair, jewelry, cosmetics and children's toys-novelty business. More retailers are turning to Almar to provide a fashion-forward look without long lead times and bloated inventories.

The pundits predict holiday sales gains are shaping up to be modest at best with consumers making fewer trips to stores and doing more research to zero in on the stores and products they've researched online and want to buy at the best price.

ShopperTrak reported in a new forecast that national retail sales would rise by just 3 percent during November and December. The company predicts foot traffic will be 2.2 percent less than a year ago. Those in stores are also expected to make beelines for bargains.

Drug chains and discounters want to put a strong message forward in the beauty department and that's where Almar comes in, said Allen Ash, vice president of sales.

"We've always specialized in providing retailers with closer-to-need merchandise, but we're seeing an even bigger need now," said Ash. He believes this is crucial in nail color because of a constant consumer demand for new. "Nail polish has been on a constant uptrend for the last 18 months."

In fact, Ash sees nail polish as the new must-

have accessory, supplanting jewelry. "We used to find that in a down economy, women updated looks with jewelry. Now it is nail," he said, adding that his firm is able to provide retailers with the "crackly" look popular now. "Now, nail polish is the feel-good purchase and the right nail colors complete an outfit."

He also was able to outfit retailers with glow in the dark and other holiday looks for Halloween. Pricing is keen with prepacks with four different colors of nail and matching lip gloss priced under \$5. The majority of Almar's items are under the Expressions logo.

The order-to-delivery time is compressed versus buying from larger firms with retailers able to secure merchandise in less than two weeks.

Where Almar's business was driven by smaller merchants in years gone by, Ash said even the big chains are seeking closer-to-need orders. "Everything in cosmetics right now is based on newness and the buzz created," Ash said, adding Almar is also working on

licenses and up-to-the-moment technologies, such as wipes for beauty products. In novelties, Almar has deals with candy licenses such as Nerds and Laffy Taffy.

Almar has helped retailers such as Toys "R" Us garner sales in kids' beauty products, but has also expanded to serve the likes of Justice, Burlington Coat Factory, J.C. Penney and Ulta. With retailers casting an eye on inventory and turns, he said many chains are cutting into planned lines to find more promotional and off-shelf space for trend merchandise.

One regional chain buyer said, "We are expecting a decent Christmas for beauty, but we know overall our traffic could be down so we shifted more dollars to promotions from companies like Almar. This could be something that saves our Christmas."

critical mass
by Faye Brookman

Jung Talks Empowerment at CEW

ANDREA JUNG has served at the helm of Avon Products Inc. since 1999, and she still firmly believes the company is more about empowering women than making products.

"[The founding of the company] was really about selling economic independence. Fast-forward 125 years, that's what I think of our company. Not as a lipstick or skin care company," said Jung during CEW's Newsmaker Forum Wednesday night at the Harmonie Club in Manhattan. The forum was moderated by Jill Scalmandre, chief marketing officer of Chrysalis.

Jung recalled a story of a woman in Turkey who has lost her home and belongings during the devastating earthquake there in 2003.

"Her husband didn't want her to work, but she began to sell Avon while he worked, and she became our top senior executive unit leader and made enough to buy a home and belongings," Jung said. "She says she is one of the only women in her village whose husband comes home and cooks dinner for her."

And while Avon is the largest engine of women's economic opportunity in the world, it is also the largest engine of lipstick in the world, selling four lipsticks every second. It makes 1,000 new products every year.

To keep the direct-sell model relevant in the age of technology, Avon has evolved it over time.

"If you look at the last 10 years' direct sales in every major geography, direct sales has continued to gain share. I think that the perception is [direct selling is] more antiquated [and that] the Internet and modern retail formats have either eclipsed it or made



PHOTO BY STEVE ECKHART

"[The founding of the company] was really about selling economic independence."

— ANDREA JUNG,
AVON PRODUCTS INC.

it far more difficult, but if you look at every geography, even developing markets, the last 10 years have been good ones."

By implementing e-tools, Facebook, a virtual Avon store and a pdf file of an Avon brochure, among other social media and digital efforts, Avon, said Jung, has evolved with the times.

The company has 20 Twitter feeds and two million followers and fans.

"Seventy percent of Avon reps do business online," said Jung.

— ANDREA NAGEL



De Jongh Frères - Paris - Workers in front of the mill entrance. 800



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