



How Retailers Fit into the Festival/Event Picture

Every year, towns all over Mississippi put on festival and events during the spring and fall of the year. During the spring and fall some of our largest events will take place. These include Market Street Festival in Columbus, Peter Anderson Festival in Ocean Springs, Prairie Arts Festival in West Point, Seafood Festival in Biloxi, Tomato Festival in Crystal Springs, and the Slugburger Festival in Corinth. Farmers Markets, music series and many smaller events are gearing up for the spring and fall at the same time. During this time, Directors ask me what can they do for their retailers in the downtown district.

Many retailers are concerned with festivals and events because they are uninformed about the event. It is important that retailers stay connected to your Main Street Organizations for information and motivation for an upcoming event. Plan...Plan...Plan...

20 Things a Retailer can do to Boost Traffic during an Event

1. Think ahead! Buy for the event when you go to market. Anticipate the events and festivals that take place in your downtown. Purchase extras or event related wares when you do your buying for the season. For instance, if you are an upscale women's wear shop, you may want to purchase some fun flip-flops, sunglasses or inexpensive sun hats to sell on the day/weekend of a summer event.
2. Offer tastings. This is a "no brainer" for restaurants and stores who carry specialty foods. Shops can think out of the box by having wine tastings, chocolate tastings or gourmet food tastings are always popular. Businesses who are not likely to participate in an event can get into this in a fun way. If you are an insurance company, there is no reason you could not invite people in and hold a tasting of your favorite pound cakes or if you are a spa, have tastings of different stress relieving waters (Cucumber, lemon, orange, Etc.) Be creative.
3. Have Demonstrations. If you are a gift shop that sells pottery, have an artist throwing pottery in front of your shop. Be sure to let the Main Street Director know so they can help advertise the demonstration that will be going on during the event. Or, if you are a sporting goods store, have someone demonstrate the art of hand tying fishing lures. The artisans and companies from which you purchase are generally happy to demonstrate their products with little or no charge to the retailer. You just have to ask in time for them to schedule and get the necessary supplies.
4. Give away free t-shirts with your store logo on them. Or for that matter, anything with your logo on them. Event and festivalgoers love something for nothing. Computer repair shops could give away memory sticks, put glass protectors on phones, and set up charging station for people to charge their phones. Sometimes if the retailer will ask their suppliers they can get free merchandise to give away during the event. For instance, if you are a pet shop, ask IAMS to give you a couple of boxes of free dog

biscuits to give out and set up a watering/snack station for people that will have pets in tow during the event.

5. Set up a popcorn machine and give away free bags of popcorn to everyone that comes in. The smell of popcorn will waft out to the street and you do not have to give away a giant portion to make people happy. A small cupful would make moms with little ones VERY happy they stopped in.
6. Have a fashion show or live mannequins in the window! Spill out onto the sidewalk when you do. A crowd will gather and soon everyone will want to see what is going on.
7. Meet the expert. Have an expert in a field that pertains to your business attend and speak to patrons about their products. A landscape architect, a stylist or interior designer can give invaluable advice. Use your Master Gardeners they are a wealth of knowledge.
8. How-to sessions. If you are a florist, do a flower arranging session. Or, if you are a bakery or restaurant, demonstrate cake decorating.
9. Theme snacks. Watermelon in the summer, pumpkin soup in the fall. Have fun with the season or theme.
10. Book signings. Have a book signing – even if you are not a bookstore. Have the author, artist, and expert selling his/her books in your store and agree to continue carrying them for a period of time - even if you are a salon.
11. Give 5-minute neck massages for \$5.00.
12. Have a costumed character. This may seem cliché, but it is always a hit.
13. Music in the store. Get your next-door neighbor that plays around on his guitar to set up in the back corner and provide some music. The music does not have to be complicated. People love music and it sets a happy mood for shoppers.
14. Storytelling. This is not just for Children. Have men tell their “Fish stories”. Have a meteorologist tell stories about weather phenomenons. Have a world traveler tell about places they have been. Stories can be fascinating. Do not forget to make up signs and post around the event area to advertise the times.
15. Crafts for kids. Even if there is a kid’s area, there is no reason you cannot hold a clothesline art contest, or set up finger painting table outside your shop. Just remember not to make it too complicated. Kids want instant gratification and will not want to wait forever for a plaster or glue to dry.
16. Food, food, food! Give away food, demonstrate food preparation, talk about food, and give away recipes of food you have to taste. People love food and if you cook it they will come.
17. Dress up! You and your staff should have fun. Whether you all decide to wear tuxedos or everyone dresses like a Disney character or their favorite animal, nothing catches the eye like people dressed up and having fun!
18. Send special invitations. Take the top 10% of your customers and send them a special invitation to come by and have a glass of wine or lemonade and take advantage of a “VIP sales area”. This may bring people in that would otherwise not shop on that day.
19. Have a contest on social media that day. Where is the coffee bean located in your store? If you find the coffee bean (Large cardboard coffee bean) you will win a free cup of gourmet coffee. This is a fun activity that you can put of social media and people love a scavenger hunt.
20. Have hourly discounts during the event. Will drive traffic in slow times during the event.

Ten Tips for Retailers to Survive Festival Fury

1. Stay informed and get involved. Know what is happening in your downtown. Join Main Street.
2. Plan for events. Calendars are put out months in advance. When at market buy goods for each event.
3. Set aside advertising dollars for the event. Don't depend on Main Street to get out all the information about what you are doing in your store.
4. DO NOT close the day of an event. It is bad business and sends the wrong message to your customers.
5. DO NOT put a sign on your door saying no "public restrooms". Have a youth or someone whose job that day is taking care of the restrooms. Have bottled water for your customers while they look around, and treat each person as if they are there only because you have the greatest store. They will remember and they will be back.
6. Have enough help that you can get out and enjoy some of the festivities.
7. Suggest to the event organizers that they have a retailer or business liaison. This helps with communications and also gives the retailers a voice. It is your responsibility to sell during an event not the event organizers.
8. Decorate accordingly. Make sure the store is festive.
9. Sponsor the event and maximize exposure. Supporting the event is a great way to get your name out there and be a team player.
10. But above all the items on this list, you must have FUN!