



heating up your candle sales

Floral and candle industry professionals offer tips for buying, merchandising and marketing candles.

BY MATT KELLY

Once you've decided to introduce candles or a new line of candles into your shop's giftware selection, it can be challenging to decide which brands, styles, fragrances and colors to sell. In order to take your shop in the right direction, it's vitally important to understand the motivations behind consumers' candle purchases.

choosing new candles

Because prominent customer preferences may vary from one shop to another, there will always be some risk involved in selling untested new candles. **Michelle Sholund**, owner of **By the Bay Botanicals** (www.bythebaybotanicals.com), says the key is to start by offering a good variety of products from at least two suppliers.

"Make sure those brands are not offered by a neighboring shop to reduce competition," Michelle writes in her e-book *Six Easy Tips to Maximize Candle Sales*. "Finding different candle brands is as easy as going to a gift show, picking up a retail trade magazine or doing a simple Internet search."

Once you've considered a variety of candle products' qualities, fragrance

potencies, waxes, wicks, container styles, packaging, etc., it's time to choose the brands your shop will carry and which specific products your customers would prefer. Although you may already have a feel for your customers' priorities, **Joe Rowley**, director of marketing for **Trapp Fragrances**, suggests that fragrance is the biggest factor for the majority of customers and recommends that you start by choosing products with the best-selling fragrances first, regardless of your personal preferences.

"Some you'll like, some you'll dislike," Joe says. "That's just human nature, but pick the fragrances that are best-sellers because that's what the market has already proved."

It's also important to test candles before you buy them, according to Michelle. Not only does this help you rule out products that don't meet your standards but it also enables you and your staff to become a resource for your customers and help to validate their purchasing decisions based on your experience.

promotions and sales

Joe says candles and home fragrances, in particular, respond well to multiple

unit pricing strategies. For example, he recommends that shops sell his large poured candles for about \$30 per candle but also offer two for \$55.

"What's great about that is, on a consumable item like a candle, when it's suggested, consumers typically buy two or three," Joe explains.

Similarly, Michelle encourages florists to try "Two-fer Tuesday" promotions where, if consumers buy two candles, they can get a third candle for free or half off. She has found "This Just In" sales to be effective as well, offering a percentage off of new candle fragrances for a limited time.

You should also consider starting a "candle reward program," according to Michelle. "Just like free coffee punch cards, make a candle reward punch card where if a customer buys five candles, the sixth one is free, or if they buy nine, the 10th is free," she says. You can keep shoppers' punch cards in an index box for their convenience or track each purchase with a smartphone app.

selling with signage

"Romance cards"—small descriptive signs posted with displays, can be used to offer customers product information,

and employee tips about the merchandise and more. This will help you personalize your displays, Michelle believes, setting your store apart from the competition.

Most major candle suppliers offer signage, according to Michelle. She says signs featuring candle brands should be your first priority in candle displays. It may be necessary to create your own signage for displays of smaller candle brands.

"Simple and cost-effective signs are easy to create using Microsoft Word, Pages for Mac or a simple desktop publishing program," Michelle shares. "Online printers such as Vistaprint are also helpful. For a few dollars, you get professionally printed signs. Just make sure you have permission to reprint a company's logo if you choose to do so."

merchandising strategies

Regardless of whether your candles are displayed on shelves, tables, hutches, crates, etc., Michelle says you should group your candle lines together in a core area along with a style of furniture that matches the style of the candles.

"Displays should blend into your store's character and general aesthetic and yet be distinguished enough to catch and focus the eye," says **Martin Biedermann**, owner of **Biedermann & Sons Inc.** "Wood hutches are standbys, but a lot can be accomplished with tabletop layouts and stock shelving."

Florists can ramp up candle sales by incorporating them into seasonal merchandise displays. By adding pastel-colored candles to Easter displays or aqueous fragrances to a summer beach

theme, Michelle says you allow candles to serve double duty, providing additional exposure for your candles.

In addition to visually drawing customers to your products, the best way to sell a candle brand is to include testers with your merchandise displays, according to Joe. His company regularly consults between 15,000 and 20,000 Trapp consumers. When asked, "How did you discover the brand Trapp?" respondents' No. 1 answer is that they "smelled a candle tester burning in a store."

The scent of a burning candle encourages consumers to ask what they are smelling, which, Joe says, can lead to sales opportunities. "It's a way to engage consumers," he shares. "Whenever you're busy, testers will be your little silent salesmen."

composing candles

As you search for new candles to add to your product selection, it may be helpful to brush up on the various types of waxes and wicks that candles comprise.

Although many consumers make candle purchasing decisions based on container styles, fragrances, packaging, etc., environmentally conscious consumers may also consider whether natural materials were used to create the products. Wicks made from paper and/or cotton and wood wicks are often combined with soy, palm, bees' and coconut waxes to create 100-percent-natural candles.

must-know waxes

PARAFFIN A byproduct of petroleum production, paraffin wax requires little heat to burn and provides the strongest "scent throw," which means it can efficiently fill a room with fragrance. One of the most popular waxes, paraffin offers a relatively inexpensive option for candle makers.

PALM Known for the crystallized pattern that forms on the outside of it, palm wax tends to be appreciated more for its appearance than its fragrance. Along with soy, bees' and coconut waxes, this natural wax has a limited shelf life, so it's important to avoid overstocking palm-wax candles.

SOY Made from soybeans, this natural wax is often combined with botanical additives although there are 100-percent soybean waxes available. Soy candles have a relatively high melting point, so they work better with high-heat wicks. They also burn cooler, cleaner and longer than paraffin candles.

BEESWAX Although this natural wax is often more expensive than other waxes, it appeals to many customers seeking high-end candles. As with other natural waxes, beeswax burns slowly and cleanly and can be used alone or blended with paraffin to increase quality and burn time.

COCONUT This natural wax also has a limited shelf life, gives off an excellent hot and cold scent throw, adheres well to glass and burns very clean.

GEL "Gel waxes have been making a comeback in recent years," says **Blair Clark**, office manager for **Lone Star Candle Supply**. "A lot of people use gel wax in clear containers with sand and seashells at the bottom," she explains.

types of wicks

ZINC CORE Often used to create votives, pillars and gel wax candles, this type of wick is the least expensive and most commonly produced. Zinc filament at its center helps the wick remain in place

and upright while the candle is lit or being poured.

100 PERCENT COTTON With a cleaner burn to avoid carbon buildup and reduce smoke, these coreless, braided wicks are designed to curl at the tip while burning, moving the tip to the edges of the flame where it burns hottest. Cotton wicks are suitable for votive, pillar, container and gel candles.

PAPER/COTTON Thick and sturdy, paper/cotton wicks burn at a relatively high temperature, making them suitable not only for use with paraffin waxes but also for soy or palm wax candles, which require more heat and energy to burn.

PAPER CORE Ideal for use in outdoor citronella candles, these wicks burn at a very high temperature. They also put off lots of fragrance and smoke to help keep mosquitos and gnats away.

WOOD Made from two thin pieces of wood pressed together for burn stability and added heat, wood wicks are treated in an oil solution that helps them to stay lit. These wicks don't burn at a high temperature, so they tend to perform best in paraffin wax. "They sort of pop and crackle like a fire when they're lit, but they don't crackle as much in soy wax as in paraffin wax," Blair explains.

(See candle options on page 34.)

candle options



Glitter White 1.5" Diameter ball candle on a Medium Starfish Plate from Biedermann & Sons Inc.



Signature Bella Freesia blended soy and vegetable wax candle from Greenleaf.



Signature Spa Spring blended soy and vegetable wax candle from Greenleaf.



Premier Candle LED-lit vanilla-scented wax candles from Carson Home Accents.



Glass container candles and other fragrances from Comfort Candle Company.



Utopia citrus-fragrance jar candles from Comfort Candle Company.



Simplux LED 360-degree flicker flameless candles from Melrose International.



Simplux Smooth LED flameless candles from Melrose International.



Assorted Black Pillar Candles from Jamali Floral & Garden Supplies.



Black Pillar Candles in Antique Brass Octagon Lanterns from Jamali Floral & Garden Supplies.



Roasted Pumpkin fragrance candle collection from Northern Lights Candles.



Bob's Flower Shoppe blended soy and paraffin wax candle from Trapp Fragrances. ■