

Winter Weather

5 tips for small retail employers on how to plan for winter weather

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Winter weather can be a wildcard for small businesses and can have a significant impact on shopping behaviors. Understanding and planning for these impacts can not only mitigate that risk, it can also be an opportunity for business growth and increased customer satisfaction.

TIP 1: Support your community in extreme weather

Retailers that can provide services and amenities such as warm drinks, power and Wi-Fi during a neighborhood outage – or just a gathering spot for the community – help to build goodwill and long-term loyalty. Offering delivery services before, during and after weather events is another value-add. Where appropriate, collaborate with neighboring businesses and community organizations to get your message out. Utilize social media in advance of and during these events to amplify messaging to your customers and community.

TIP 2: Leverage Mother Nature to lift traffic into your physical and digital storefronts

During core winter months, mild and dry days can provide opportunities to encourage foot traffic into your storefront. Consider offering ad hoc promotions in conjunction with favorable weather. Periods of unseasonable cold and snow provide an ideal opportunity to drive traffic to your website. Sending targeted email and text messages to your customers can raise brand awareness and increase sales.

TIP 3: Have flexible merchandising strategies

Inclement weather can be a source of stress for shoppers. Displaying weather-relevant products in prominent locations in your store and website can increase customer satisfaction. For example, in cold or snowy conditions, placing rock salt near the front door, soup close to fresh bread, and other need-based items in high traffic areas all help to increase sales and improve customer satisfaction. In addition, convenience amenities such as umbrella stands, wet floor signs and high-quality floor mats can provide a safe environment for customers to shop.

TIP 4: Optimize staffing based on forecasted weather

During periods of inclement weather it is common for many businesses to have fewer customers walk in the door. Consider reducing staffing levels and focus on operational activities. During mild and dry conditions, additional staff can handle increased shopper traffic and improve customer service levels.

TIP 5: Understand weather impacts on winter holiday purchasing

For many small businesses, the holiday season represents a significant percentage of their annual sales. During the holidays, the impact of weather is often larger than other times of the year. While mild and dry weather often favors foot traffic into stores, cold conditions can influence the items placed in customers' shopping baskets. Significantly inclement weather can also shift consumers to buy online or delay purchasing to later in the season.

For additional information including updated insights, please visit NRF's [WeatherIQ page](#), which is published regularly in conjunction with industry partner [Planalytics](#).

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