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Seasonality: a springboard for category growth

Spring has sprung, summer is around the corner and it will be autumn before we know it. So, what are the opportunities to drive category growth through the seasons? Pharmacy Guild in-store advertising partners TorchMedia discuss.

The concept of seasonality is not new in Pharmacy. Winter cold and flu, summer tanning and spring hayfever relief promotions have been a mainstay for decades. But is it being done strategically, with predetermined targets for category growth, or ad hoc and on the fly?

Let's look at the category opportunities, and then we'll offer some tips to increase your seasonal category sales.

'For everything, there is a season'

If we focus on the top 15 Pharmacy categories, according

to Nielsen, there are seasonal applications for many of them.

Starting with the No.1 category, vitamins and supplements. For winter, we can focus on coughs, cold and arthritis. For spring and summer, allergy, hayfever and weight loss. In autumn we may want to focus on building immunity in time for winter.

What about No.2, cosmetics? Bronzers and tinted moisturisers with sunscreen in summer, pale and matte shades in winter, brighter colours in spring, and muted, warm tones for autumn.

Hair care? Treat your dull, lifeless winter locks to a spring revitalisation. Tousele them for summer or explore a sun-kissed look.

Baby? Allergies in spring and summer. Colds and flu in autumn and winter.

Weight management? Shape up in spring and summer, maintain in autumn and winter.

And so it goes. But how, in real terms, can you leverage the category growth?

1. Be clear and measurable in your seasonal category growth goals

Having category growth goals is not just for brand manufacturers and 'head office' if you're part of a banner. If you're serious about your role as a retailer as well as a Pharmacist, you'll want to think about what the role of each category is in your store and at what time of year.

What percentage of your sales can you expect cold and flu product to be in winter, and how can you grow it versus last year? Hayfever in spring? Weight loss in summer? Arthritis in autumn?

Talk to your brand manufacturer reps about what their category growth goals are for the season, and then set your own across the whole category (not just their brands).

What margins are you getting on seasonal promotions and how can you drive those promotions harder?

Sit down and go through at least the top 15 categories in your store and set targets for seasonal growth by looking at last year's figures, then consider what's possible through deliberate and strategic seasonal marketing in-store.

It's important to work out how you will measure all this. What information is available from your POS data, and how can you analyse it? Or will you just be relying on stock turn information? How will you measure the success of specific seasonal promotions? Be clear

■ **Chart 4: Pharmacy trade performance by top 15 categories for MAT to 13/03/2011 - National.**

MAT to 13/03/2011	VAL RANK (MAT)	Val % Growth YA	Unit % Growth YA
Vitamins & supplements	1	5.9	4.4
Cosmetics	2	8.8	8.0
Analgesics	3	0.8	2.4
Cosmetic skin care	4	-0.8	1.2
Coughs/cold/sinus & flu	5	-0.1	0.4
Other Pharmacy	6	7.8	-2.3
Therapeutic skin care	7	2.1	1.3
Gastro-intestinal	8	1.5	1.0
Allergy & hayfever	9	3.6	4.3
Baby	10	-2.0	-5.1
Hair care	11	3.1	2.9
Weight management	12	1.6	-2.9
Foot Care	13	2.8	1.3
Wound care	14	4.1	0.3
Smoking cessation	15	-1.3	0.2

Source: Nielsen ScanTrack Pharmacy

upfront on how you will measure if you have achieved your seasonal category growth target.

2. Develop cross-category solutions for seasonal conditions

Consider having a brainstorming session with your staff on what the seasonal conditions are that plague your Pharmacy shoppers. What are people coming in asking about? Why leave this approach exclusively to the brand manufacturers when you actually have a unique opportunity, being at the coalface, to learn how seasons affect people’s health and needs? Pharmacists and Pharmacy staff are better placed than most to really understand what shoppers need at different times of the year.

Once you’ve listed all the seasonal conditions and needs, think through what the solutions might look like, incorporating various categories in the store. Cross-category bundles that address seasonal needs: immunity-building supplements along with cough and cold relief, eye drops and skin care products for dry skin.

Take the occasions further than the obvious. What do people really want when they come in for weight-loss products in spring or summer? While there will be some with broader health reasons for losing weight, others simply want to look good.

Can you create a cross-category bundle for ‘your best bikini body’ with weight-loss products, cellulite creams and bronzers/fake tans, even waterproof mascara? Are you actually marketing to the need to look good rather than just straight-ahead weight loss? You, more than anyone, are best placed to understand the needs of your own shoppers.

Also, because you are not limited by the agenda of only one brand, you are also in a unique position to develop genuine cross-category solutions to meet those needs.

3. Market to seasonal occasions in an integrated way

Once you’ve brainstormed your seasonal occasions and conditions, and thought about how to offer cross-category bundled solutions for those needs, the next step is to integrate your marketing approach so you can meet those category growth targets.

Think about the shopper path to purchase for the seasonal occasions you have workshopped. If it’s cough and cold, are they likely to go straight to the OTC counter? If so, does your

marketing need to start there, with counter displays and your digital screen (if a Guild Pharmacy)?

If it’s weight loss or looking good, are they likely to poke around the shelf looking for information before they approach a staff member? If so, your educational point-of-purchase displays and merchandising become more important here.

For each category you are trying to grow, how important is the ability to interact with it? If it’s anything to do with skin care, looking good, cosmetics, etc, you will know from experience that shoppers want to open the pack, then smell, try and test the product.

Develop a swift ‘plan on a page’ marketing approach for each of the seasonal categories you want to grow. Work out what you need from brand manufacturers versus what is your own content, such as some of the content on your digital screen, some of your own displays and things like loyalty programs and store cards.

What are your seasonal offers for loyal, regular shoppers? How will you reward them and support them through the seasons? How will you let them know your willingness to do this? Via your digital screen, staff recommendation, e-newsletters? How?

4. Measure success as a benchmark for next year

By now you’ve set your category growth goals, understood the seasonal shopper occasions and conditions, developed cross-category solutions for each and marketed them in-store. When you set your goals, you also worked out how you would measure success.

At the end of each season, when the data becomes available, measure your category growth in the nominated categories, and on the success of specific seasonal promotions. Did you achieve what you were aiming for? What worked? What will you tweak proceedings for next time?

We hope this four-step approach to increasing seasonal category growth opportunities is useful.

As always, if you’re a Guild Pharmacy with a digital screen, we also suggest you have a chat with your local TorchMedia representative about how you can best use the percentage of your screen time that is local to your store, with content determined by you. This is one of the best opportunities you’ll have to drive seasonal category sales, and we’re here to help. **RP**

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