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THE SOUND OF YOUR BUSINESS: 5 TIPS FOR STRIKING THE RIGHT TONE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



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For consumers, holiday shopping is about more than the gifts they are purchasing. It is about the joy of the season; getting into the holiday mood and mindset; reconnecting with family and friends; and the experience of discovering and selecting that perfect gift for loved ones. Retailers curate these experiences for in-store shoppers using sound, scent, signage, design, lighting and more to engage the senses and evoke emotion in a way that eCommerce simply cannot replicate.

And nothing sets the mood like music. A well-executed Holiday Music Strategy will lift customers' spirits, help set a festive tone for your business and reinforce your brand's unique voice and personality. It can also contribute to overall business objectives: If consumers enjoy the experience, they are going to spend more time there, and be more likely to come back year-round.

But holiday music can be surprisingly tricky. It is easy to aggravate customers or employees with cheesy or incessant "cheer," or to unwittingly play a song that is culturally insensitive. To help you deliver happy, festive moments for shoppers while strengthening your brand and maximizing the peak season, we are sharing key tips for how to perfect your Retail Holiday Music Strategy.

TIP 1 BE STRATEGIC.

In-store music is too important to leave to chance. You will want to create a strategy for crafting and executing this year's seasonal playlists. Nothing great ever happens on shuffle. Choose melodies that spread cheer while helping shoppers relax, feel inspired and get into the holiday shopping spirit. Consider seasonal tunes that evoke nostalgia - that bring consumers back to the warm holiday memories of their youth - as long as they are on-brand.

You should also consider the average time your customers spend shopping, known as their dwell time. Then, you can shape the experience to match the cadence of your customer. For example, if your average dwell time is 30 minutes, then consider crafting your musical experiences in similarly-timed increments. The idea is that as you know your customers better, make sure you are using that data and insight so you don't miss your chance to connect with them. Look at each shopping engagement as a unique experience. How will you shape the next 30 minutes?

TIP 2 REMEMBER, A LITTLE DASH WILL DO.

As heartwarming as holiday hits can be, they can quickly lose their luster. Aim to weave in holiday music with other genres to avoid over saturating shoppers (and in-store staff!) and to stay true to and consistent with your own brand voice. Consider that shoppers may be hearing the same songs in other retail locations they visit. Thoughtful in-store music is a way to stand out and strengthen your brand. It is generally best practice to take an incremental and scaled approach to introduce a holiday playlist, increasing the percentage of holiday-specific music as you inch closer to the final shopping day. Thus, instead of ever playing 100% holiday music, maintain a well-rounded mix of brand-appropriate songs -- both holiday and non-holiday -- to save both your employees and your customers from hearing the same tunes ad nauseam.

And, speaking of employees - in today's competitive labor market, workplace culture matters more than ever. Playing the same holiday songs over and over makes for a less-than-ideal work environment. Create a pleasant vibe for your team, so they can be better ambassadors for your brand. It's important to nurture good company culture and to not sacrifice staff experience in your efforts to create an optimum customer experience for shoppers.

**The goal is to
find that sweet
spot that creates
an environment
that is positive
and engaging for
in-store employees
and shoppers
alike.**

TIP 3 UNDERSTAND THE NEW HOLIDAY SHOPPING SEASON TIMELINE.

The holiday shopping season has been extending gradually over time. This year, due to supply chain challenges and shipping concerns, there is a palpable urgency. Retailers are sending a clear message to consumers: start your gift shopping early to ensure you get what you need on time. This sentiment may inspire consumers to shop in-store, rather than online, so they can leave with a gift in hand. This also means shoppers are rethinking their lists, and checking them off as early as they can. And retailers recognizing this have already revamped their holiday promotion schedule - opting for a series of sales that kick off earlier than usual and expanding from the previous one-day-only sales tactics.

What does this mean for music? If in-store music is programmed properly, you can start peppering in holiday songs very selectively earlier in the year - as early as late October and onward if you're also starting to include small amounts of holiday POS and in-store messaging - since consumers are already in the holiday shopping mindset.

TIP 4 DON'T DROWN OUT THE VOICE OF YOUR BRAND.

For some retailers, holiday classics are a natural extension of their brand. For others, it can be harder to reconcile the holiday spirit with their brand voice. A talented Music Designer can help identify songs that capture the spirit of the season--songs about family and friends, community, love, and hope--without veering into overly cheesy, uncouth or otherwise off-brand territory.

When experimenting with holiday tunes that feel more contemporary, look for tried and true songs sung by today's familiar artists. We've already seen more traditional holiday music revamped in recent years, with many modern artists releasing their takes on holiday classics. Truly new, original holiday songs take longer to catch on, though. It takes years for a song to become ingrained into our collective zeitgeist. Case-in-point: Mariah Carey's "modern hit," *All I Want for Christmas is You*, is more than 25-years-old.

TIP 5 BE CULTURALLY AND SOCIALLY SENSITIVE.

It is always best practice to avoid off-putting or polarizing selections. Unless your brand is highly unique and embraces "cheese" as part of its overall personality, shtick and novelty songs rarely come across as cute or funny to the majority of shoppers and hardly ever stick. This year, be particularly vigilant as you select and assess in-store music and be cognizant of culturally and socially appropriate selections. Holiday music is brought out usually only once a year, which means it does not get the benefit of year-round access. It needs to be reviewed. You need a process for lyrical review or a partner who can assure every song you play has been properly vetted. Just as businesses should do year-round with all musical playlists, it's important to be mindful of all lyrics in your song selections to ensure the lyrics abide by your own individual brand standards and are in sync with the values of your target audience(s).

Music programming solutions for retailers allow you to be as hands-on or hands-off as you like. You can leverage **music for business technology** to curate seasonal playlists, or rely on streaming solutions as long as the selections are vetted and properly licensed for commercial usage to play in your business. To design and regularly update a custom soundtrack, consider working with a **Music Designer**. When every melody is handpicked, your in-store experience is more likely to stand out, feel authentic, and instill positive brand associations with shoppers.

Follow these tips to help you craft a Holiday Music Strategy that captures the magic of the season and the joy of shopping, while avoiding potential pitfalls. **For more information on how Mood Media can help you create a strategy and put your holiday music plan into action, visit us.moodmedia.com/sound.**

