

Emphasizing special events

Stores are working harder to draw shoppers, adding more promotions and signings

As competition for shoppers—and their wallets—has increased in the last five years, Christian retailers have ramped up their efforts in running special promotions to attract consumers.

The number of such events took a significant jump in 2010, and with big events planned for the latter part of 2011, it looks like retailers may set new records for the number of promotions hosted.

TOP DRAWS

The three most common special events used by stores so far this year have been author book signings, remainder/tent sales and in-store music events. Three out of five stores (61%) hosted author events in the first half of 2011, equal to the number that did so in all of 2010 and 2009, and up 18% from 2007.

Two in five stores (39%) have promoted a remainder/tent sale in 2011, slightly fewer than did so last year, but dead even with the years 2007-2009. Fall and pre-Christmas are typically popular times for remainder sales, so the total number for 2011 is certain to go up.

In-store music events took a big jump last year, up 37% over the previous year. With just over one in four (28%) of respondents having held one so far this year, 2011 looks to be on track to equal or exceed the previous three years' level of music events.

The number of stores trying to attract customers with pastor breakfasts, new-release events and best customer/VIP sales has remained steady—at one in five or six—since 2007.

The bump in promotional activity in 2010 saw increases in every type of special event. For example, twice as many stores hosted new-release events in 2010 (28%) as did in 2009 (14%).

The increases for the year might be attributable to events tied to the inaugural Christian Store Day, which saw almost 500 stores taking part.

SUCCESS FACTORS

In-store author appearances can be successful, and 28% of stores told *Christian Retailing* that such events were the “best promotion” they have arranged. They can also be among the least successful, however, as was the case for 11% of respondents.

Remainder/tent sales were rated as the “most effective” special events by 25%. The number of stores tagging kids’

day events as the “least effective” activity they have done was three times than the number reporting that such efforts were their “best.”

Participation with other local stores in Chamber of Commerce-type promotions was an even 50/50 split among for-profit Christian retail stores (church stores don’t typically belong to their local chamber). Among those who do join in community-wide promotions, the most common reasons given were “exposure to a wider audience” and “ministry opportunity.”

Retailers look for key elements to be in place before considering special events. Among their criteria:

- » “create ‘chatter’ in the community”
- » “minimal extra staff needed”
- » “must create new traffic”
- » “something different for our shoppers”
- » “won’t take up a lot of space.”

CONSUMER VIEWS

Consumers in our survey said that the most compelling elements in retail promotions they had attended were product demonstrations, the attendance of manufacturers’ reps, VIP invites and “fun” activities. Nearly half (45%) told us they had attended a “going out of business sale” in the last year—the same number who went to a “grand opening celebration.”

Just over a third (35%) were drawn to a retail store through a “celebrity appearance,” while 20% were attracted by charity tie-ins, tent sales or new-release parties.

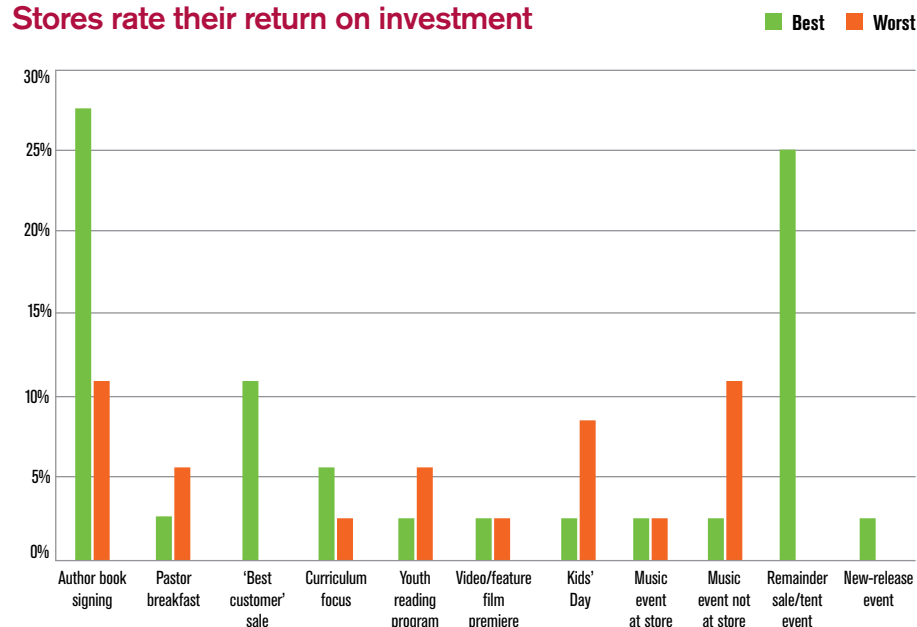
The success of Christian Store Day in October 2010 has led to expansion of the event to include a longer promotion this year. As of early August, half of responding stores that had participated in 2010 planned to promote the event in 2011, 14% said they would opt out this year, and 36% were undecided.

And what about Christmas, the biggest promotional opportunity of the retail year? In addition to catalogs, emails, radio and even some TV advertising, one store’s plan for getting the attention of the shoppers includes sending top customers a \$5 gift card as a thank-you and inviting them to an exclusive Christmas Open House with door prizes and giveaways. **CR**

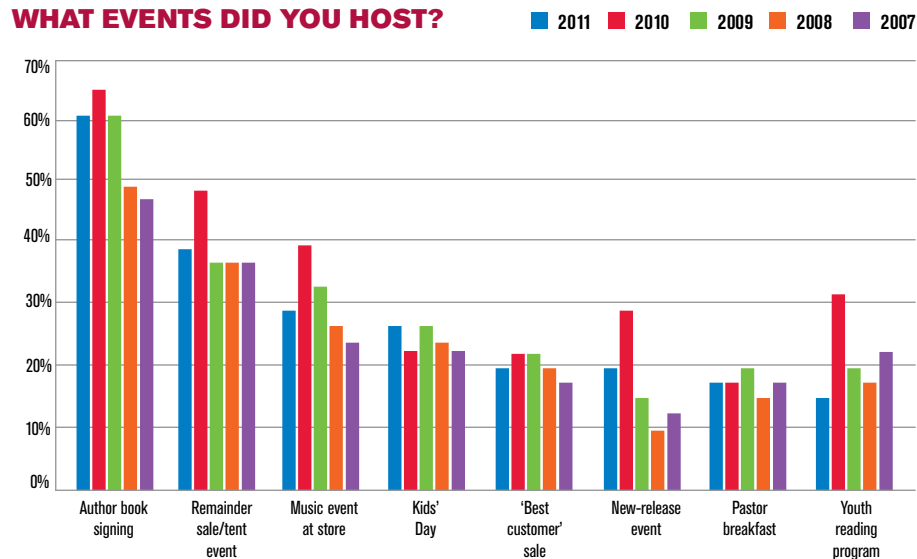
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EVALUATING EVENTS

Stores rate their return on investment



WHAT EVENTS DID YOU HOST?



CUSTOMER PARTICIPATION

