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Retailing Tips: Create a Profitable Mix

Adding Items Besides Toys Can Bring New Customers and Sales

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Mixing toys with other merchandise is a method used by several specialty toy-store owners to help increase traffic, customer base and sales, they told **TDmonthly Magazine**. But just throwing anything into the mix is not the answer. Combining the right items with toys is critical to the success of the store's blend.

"Provide additional items that customers can use, such as a line of 'easy carry' bags for parents whose kids take toys on outings." — *Harmony Tenney, IBEC Inc.*

1. Listen for What's Missing. Take notice when customers ask for something specific or mention a niche that's not being filled. "They have cash. Allow them to spend it with you," said Harmony Tenney, a retail specialist for International Business Empowerment Consultants, Inc. Owner Kim Smith told **TDmonthly** about her toy store's evolution: "There was a demand in town for children's clothing and we were looking for ways to get our sales up," she said. "Parents come in for clothes and kids come in for toys."



On the Park Candy Store

2. Choose Items That Complement. "We started with trains, but added specialty toys seven years ago because toys made sense with our trains," said Martha Burrows, owner of [Trains-N-Toys](#) in North Canton, Ohio. "We had moms buying trains, but there was nothing for sister. Now they can shop for everyone here."

3. Broaden Your Base. On the Park in Kingwood, Texas, opened its doors as a specialty candy and plush store, later adding more toys based on customer requests, said Owner Fred Rosenberg. "They're different businesses and attract a broader range of customers," he explained. And kids are likely to return as they grow older, given the more than 600 different types of candy — from novelty candy to Belgian chocolates.

4. Consider a Service. Owner Lesley Webb of [Little Locks Children's Salon & Toy Boutique](#) in La Jolla, Calif., told **TDmonthly** that during the first year of her joint businesses, customers would purchase toys as an add-on to a haircut. But the toy store has since made a name for itself and undergone a 50 percent expansion. "We have a captive audience in here when they're waiting to get a hair cut," she said. "I think that helps with the toy sales."



Little Locks Children's Salon

5. Think About Lifestyle. "Provide additional items that customers can use, such as a line of "easy carry" bags for parents whose kids take toys on outings," suggested Tenney.

6. Complement Your Current Business. On the Park opened a coffee bar in November, "Adult Time Out," that will serve a cup of coffee with a chocolate-covered strawberry, Rosenberg told **TDmonthly**. Even before construction was completed, moms and dads liked hanging-out at the bar, reading books and relaxing while keeping an eye on their kids in the store's play area.



On the Park

7. Be All You Can Be to Customers. For [Stellabella Toys](#) in Cambridge, Mass., that means carrying products by Ergo, Baby Bjorn and others that cater to a variety of baby needs. "These make our store a one-stop shop for customers, providing books, baby carriers — all the needs for people shopping for kids," Rick Henry said.

So think about adding items that will entice customers to spend a little more time in your store, consider what types of products complement one another, and keep your ears tuned to what customers are really looking for. Happy Mixing!

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