

# Go Team, Go!

## Hit a home run with school spirit sales

By Courtney Culey | Digital Engagement Editor



Show support for your team with Amscan's outrageous fashion accessories including wigs, wearables, body accessories, noisemakers and much more.

There's no spirit like school spirit — and party stores can score big. In today's market, while fans are cheering on their favorite teams, party and retail stores should be busy planning.

And don't think it's just for sporting events, either. School spirit wear is needed all year long — for homecoming parades, "hat days," graduation celebrations and Christmas or birthday presents.

### Target Trends

When graduation season is in full swing, party supply stores stock the shelves with merchandise matching the colors of nearby schools and sales soon follow. But some stores are finding a need to keep school spirit merchandise on the shelves 12 months out of the year.

Ann Allen of The Beistle Co. said that when schools started requesting spirit products year round, the company started producing more generic, non-grad specific spirit merchandise for the back-to-school season, homecoming celebrations, sports

banquets and school sporting events. Party stores were quick to buy into the trend.

Susan Beer, marketing director at Amscan, agreed and said, "The customers have voted. They want it, they buy it, so we make it and sell it."

"People like to show their pride and passion and express themselves in fun, outrageous ways whether it be for sporting, club, organizational, business or school events," Beer added.

Social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, have only added to the school spirit craze.

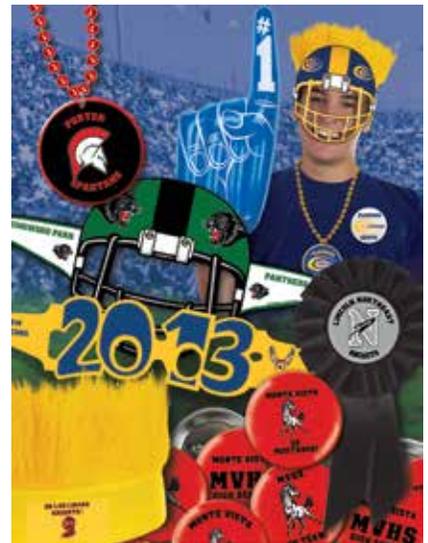
"Most everyone, everywhere you look has a phone that takes pictures," Allen said. "When kids go to sporting events, they use spirit wear to show support for their team — they take 'silly' photos and immediately post them on the Internet."

People "like," comment and share to keep the spirit alive. With silly in mind, party supply stores should keep it fresh and new.

"The more options of spirit wear, the better," Allen said. "After all, you can't take a silly photo wearing the same products as your friends or your rival team's fans. The sillier the better. Must have products include hats, wacky hair, beads both generic and sports themed, foam hands and T-shirts."

Silly is important, but a variety of color options is essential.

"The broad spectrum of color is critical in offering customers the ability to customize for any event," Beer said. "It is important to have a variety of products that dress any part of the body from the top down, and it is important to have a variety of styles and price points."



**A variety of products are available from The Beistle Co. to complete any school spirit look.**

Party supply stores can compliment these must have items with outdoor décor like yard signs and banners, but Debra Penny, owner of Check It Out, suggested that you don't forget the balloons.

Check It Out is located in a Southeastern Conference (SEC) town, so Penny said her team decorates for a football party every month on the calendar — balloons galore. And during the season, the shop closes on game days to focus on tailgate party décor.

## Going the Distance

School spirit wear will sell, that's a given, but some beforehand planning is needed to see profits soar.

"When considering a school spirit wear program, a store needs to do some research," Allen said. "Check out local schools — verify their colors and mascots and plan



**Shaker Columns that look like pom-poms in the wind, are a school spirit must-have in Check It Out's market. Photo: Debra Penny**

accordingly, research which sports each school supports as well as the size of each school and order colors and quantities that make sense for each."

And to help your sales go the distance, Allen suggested you know when each school in your market has special events, like homecoming celebrations or playoff appearances. Use

these events to expand your reach and increase your profits. Everyone wants to show his or her school pride.

But it doesn't stop there. Because school spirit wear can be sold 365 days a year, use marketing to boost your sales. Allen recommended two tactics.

Option one: target the parents directly.

"After all, they're the ones paying the bill," Allen said. "Market to schools directly via booster clubs — most are willing to distribute information to the parents if it means support for the school."

Option two: attract the students via social media.

"Stores can photograph a display of items using their largest or most local school and post it to the Internet," Allen said. Posts can be made on a website, Facebook, Twitter or a local advertising site. The goal is to get students' attention so they pass on the word to their parents.

Social media has some serious power, but don't forget to market spirit wear to the adults themselves.

"School spirit wear should be marketed to all ages," Beer said. "No one is too young or too old to have fun!"

And remember, it's better to have too much than not enough. Don't hesitate to market extra merchandise as Halloween wear. If you're lucky, college and professional sports teams will be located near by and your services will be needed by many more. When graduation season is near, rearrange your store and include spirit wear and décor in both sections.

With a little planning, added marketing and superior customer service, you're bound to hit it out of the park. **P**