

KID TESTED, MOTHER APPROVED

Find favor with customers by offering party gifts that kids love

By Haley Beiter | Special to Party and Paper

When kids are happy, moms are happy. And when stocking your shelves with party favors, it can be difficult to please both the kids who party and the moms who purchase party supplies. Kids want items that are yummy and fun. Moms are looking for gifts that are memorable, unique, safe and reflective of the guest and party. With a little planning and the right product offering, your party favors — and sales — certainly will pass the test.

Safety First

Meeting children's demands for party supplies is fairly simple. If it's tasty or fun, it's a success. According to Debbie Beer, vice president of marketing at Unique, current trends in children's party favors include bright primary colors,

engaging shapes and pieces, extended play value, contemporary designs and innovative concepts.

"Unique was founded five decades ago as a children's party favor company," Beer said. "We have expanded greatly since that time, and the industry has evolved, but children's favors remain an important category for us."

Mothers — the ones with all the buying power — are harder to please than their children. Moms are a bit more particular about what they're buying, and safety always comes first.

"We strive to offer (favors) that engage and interest kids, while maintaining quality and value for moms," Beer said. "Our party favors and accessories — as well as all of our other items — are developed under strict quality

assurance guidelines to ensure they meet national regulations in regards to consumer safety and environmental concerns."

It's critical to stock a wide range of favors, giving moms a safe option for all age groups. Also, make sure employees can help customers find toys, games and candies that are safe and age-appropriate.

Fun and Games

Even the safest products need some kind of "wow" factor to make it into a mom's shopping cart. That's why items that can be personalized for party guests or the guest of honor are a never-ending staple for party supplies. After all, the purpose of a favor is to thank people for coming to a specific party and serve as a reminder of the fun time they had. Jeny Ayres, mother of four and party hostess extraordinaire, likes items that are personalized for each guest.

"For my daughter's art party, everyone got a monogrammed paint can with crayons, candy and a crayon-shaped sugar cookie," Ayres said. She also is a fan of favors that play dual roles — an activity during the party and a gift for guests to take home. "For a party activity, guests decorated their initial in a wooden block and then decorated koozies, both of which they got to take home."

Items like Ayres' wooden block idea are popular among moms who are looking to create a memorable experience during and after the party. Unique offers such two-for-one supplies.

"Today, kids want something cool to take home from the party, and moms are pleased to find items that entertain and occupy party guests," Beer said. "We have a selection of activity books and coloring books that double as party games, as well as take-home party favors. Our party favors feature strong play-value, so that kids can play with puzzles, balls and plastic animals during the party or when they get home."

Favors that reflect the theme of the party are important, so be sure to display favors next to any and all relevant party themes. For example, a toy train whistle works well with the licensed Thomas the Train supplies, as well as a general transportation theme. When given the choice between a favor that ties in to the party or a more generic favor, moms are much more likely to coordinate.

"My favors are always in theme with the party," Ayres said. "For a dinosaur party, I had safari hats, shovels and buckets full of goodies. For a water party, there were water guns, beach balls and a shaped sugar cookie. For a pirate party, guests got cupcakes, eye patches and bandanas they decorated and wore. They also painted little treasure chests and filled their chests with candy during a scavenger hunt."

Detailed favors — like ones that are personalized or coordinating — are more memorable than generic buy-in-bulk giveaways. Kids may enjoy a cluster of candy in a clear plastic bag with twisty tie, but moms are more likely to



From bubbles and whistles to paratroopers and safari animals, Unique has everything for fun and festive favors.

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Debbie Beer
Unique



purchase color-coordinated candies in a printed bag, tied with colored ribbon and including a personalized tag thanking the recipient.

"I usually try to give party-goers a baked item and something that they can use again or that has another purpose," Ayres said. "I personally dislike 'filler' gifts. I would rather pay a little extra and give something they will later use in their room."

Cost Counts

Obviously, paying a little extra isn't an option for all customers. It's important to maintain a variety of options for those who are looking for more convenient and cost-effective favors.

"Our diverse favors selection features various package counts, products and price points to appeal to various consumer needs," Beer said. "Party favors can be as unique and personal as the people who buy them. Offering a wide variety of price points, themes, designs and products ensures that consumers can make a buying decision to reflect their personal style."



Be bad to the bone with Amscan's rocker tattoos, great for party favors in treat bags or boxes. Apply with water, non-toxic.

Beer added that with kazoos, ball puzzles, activity books, life-size insects, plastic safari animals, prancing horses, colorful dinosaurs, glittering fairy wands, die-cut stickers, color tattoos, character bounce balls ... the possibilities and themes are nearly endless.

With so many favors available, storeowners should help customers find the perfect take-home gift. The right merchandising can help overall sales.

"As moms shop for their child's birthday party, they often start with a theme and choose their paperware first — princess, safari, dinosaurs, retro, etc.," Beer said. "A diverse selection of coordinating theme favors can be merchandised right with the paperware and also throughout the party department. Favors are often impulse items, adding incremental sales to the overall purchase."

Store owners also should try cross-merchandising for moms like Ayres. Display coordinating cookie cutters, cake pans and candy molds near other favors within a particular party theme. And moms looking for memorable, detailed favors can be helped by seeing the end result. Have staff create finished favors to display, and offer demonstrations on how to create personalized, fun ideas.

While favors are only a small part of a party, their importance to kids, moms and store's sales can't be ignored. With the right inventory, merchandising, and customer service, you can find the perfect balance between kids' wants and moms' needs. **P**

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