

Features

Making a Statement

By Kate Parham

It's true what they say: Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. It's the holiday that embraces family, embodies tradition and expresses love. And one of the best ways to convey those emotions is with a statement ornament, something that becomes a part of the annual celebration and conveys your gratitude to your loved ones.

While statement ornaments are traditionally collectible or commemorative ornaments, they can range from whimsical to serious. Whether they're high-end or budget priced, the true value of commemorative ornaments is in the sentiment with which they're given. And, for those who make a tradition out of giving an ornament every year, they provide a great option for quick and easy gift-giving.

Making it Count

"You don't have to convert your store into a Christmas Wonderland; you just need to make an impact with what you do," says Tim Merck, president at Merck Family's Old World Christmas. Every year, as you decorate your Christmas tree, each ornament speaks to you, commemorating fond memories. Your customers are the same and each time they bring out their ornaments, they are "compelled to acquire new ornaments to again capture newly formed memories and traditions," says Merck.

Customers have a strong emotional connection to the ornaments they purchase. For some, it's about tradition, like the parent who gives an ornament to their child on Christmas every year. Other people use charity ornaments to raise money and awareness for a cause they believe in and to honor loved ones. And some simply purchase ornaments for the whimsical beauty of the ornaments themselves.

"The emotional connection never ceases to amaze me," says Lucas Madden, director of operations and production management at Christopher Radko. "Each ornament has a story behind it and people always remember where they got it, who gave it to them or why they purchased it."

In order for retailers to successfully make that impact, however, it's important to "know what your store is all about and what you're trying to tell the customer about your store," says Bill Mackin, gift galleries buyer at Neiman Marcus. "You have to relate [the ornaments] to what you're doing."

Patience Brewster, the artist behind the line of ornament and gifts, seconds that notion: "Whether a store specializes in holiday ornaments and gifts, or looks only to add a small offering of ornaments at holiday time, we advise that our retailers look for something that resonates with them," she says. "Passion is contagious. Buying what you love almost always translates into an effortless ability to sell that product in your store."

Equally important is it to choose ornaments that your customers will love. When it comes to statement ornaments, it's about carrying a product that speaks to your customer's heart, something that embodies family traditions, special occasions and Christmas memories.

Best Sellers



Track Stars

By Paula Felps

Joe Rightmyer still remembers the wonder of rushing from his bed on Christmas morning and seeing a Lionel railroad train snaking through the presents under the tree.

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“Anything that commemorates some type of event in someone’s life always sells really well,” says Madden. Often times, people tend to give commemorative ornaments as gifts to celebrate something that’s happened within the last year: an engagement or wedding, a new baby, a new home. “Customers are always looking for a way to connect with their ornament and show their loved ones they care.”

People also tend to buy ornaments on vacation to memorialize their trip, which is why Madden recommends retailers customize their selection to their particular region. “If you’re in Florida, carry a palm tree ornament,” he says.

Many purchases also come from people who collect ornaments, especially if they collect a certain line. At Patience Brewster, “some of our top-selling designs belong to a story or collectible series, which I continue to tell with new pieces each year,” Brewster says of her collectible lines like the Dash Away Reindeer Collection or the 12 Days of Christmas. “When a consumer starts a collection for themselves or for a friend or family member, they love to return to the line each year to add a piece and see what new surprises [have been] added to the collection.”

At Old World Christmas, Merck has found ornaments that are a commentary on society, like an American flag that was brought to market in 2001, to be top performers. People like to mark specific times of their lives with a memorializing ornament. For that reason, ornaments with the year dated across them also do very well. Another popular theme: animals. “This is probably because pets are such an integral part of our lives and everyone wants a dog or cat that reminds them of one of their best friends,” says Merck.

Who’s Buying?

Because commemorative ornaments span a large number of events and life stages—anywhere from Baby’s First Christmas to high school graduation to Our First Home—the customer demographic runs the gamut, too. “Since commemorative ornaments are predominantly given as gifts, the customer could be anyone from a good friend to a parent to a colleague or a grandparent,” says Madden. “That’s what makes statement ornaments so popular; they really speak to a lot of different people.”

Merck agrees. “Anyone wishing to purchase a keepsake type ornament that evokes a special memory or recalls a significant event [is a potential customer].”

That’s just about everyone. It could be a mother buying ornaments to commemorate a certain moment or interest in her child’s life, like a soccer ball or a ballet slipper. Another popular demographic is a couple starting their own traditions and purchasing ornaments that reflect their new life together.

And, just as far reaching as the demographic is the pricing. Statement ornaments can range from the \$9.99 traditional glass ornaments at Old World Christmas to \$100 European ornaments at Christopher Radko and all the way up to the \$500 crystal ornaments from Swarovski. “People will always buy across all levels,” says Madden. “But I think people are more willing to spend money on something that means something, like an ornament that celebrates a very significant event.”

Of course, that’s not always the case. Merck says that because of the affordability of their ornaments, customers can afford to select an ornament for their family and friends without it becoming a major purchase or sacrifice. “It isn’t the sizzle that sells in the long run, it is perceived value,” he says. “It is wonderful to see the joy these ornaments can bring to people because they offer wonderful keepsakes at exceptionally low prices.”

Images: Gingerbread ornament from Old World Christmas; brother/sister ornaments from Kurt Adler; travel ornaments from Roman Inc.; tree, Santa and gingerbread house from Old World Christmas; bird ornaments from Melrose Collection