

Jewelers say unusual times call for special events

From feng shui presentations to Brazilian themes, trunk shows get a makeover



Above left: Last October, Indianapolis-based Reis-Nichols held a special event trunk show featuring Roberto Coin jewelry. Customers were invited to Eddie Merlot, a local restaurant, where they dined with Peter Webster, president and chief executive officer of Roberto Coin. Above right: Wesche Jewelers in Melbourne, Fla., encouraged customers to try on jewelry at a "Ladies Night" event where guests could partake in wine tasting through a partnership with local shop Wine Styles.

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NEW YORK—Pulled off properly, trunk shows continue to be an exceptional selling and branding tool, but the newest game in town is what retailers are calling "the special event trunk show."

The trunk-show-plus trend cropped up over the past year, says Penny Preville, a Great Neck, N.Y.-based designer whose strong female self-purchaser following keeps her on the trunk show and personal appearance circuit all year long.

Preville set up numerous special event trunk shows at the Centurion Jewelry show in February, and she and her staff are now brainstorming on exciting themes.

"Right now, I see that everyone wants to do something special, particularly for their best customers," she says.

THE FUN FACTOR

Helene Zadok, owner of Zadok Jewelers in Houston, prefers to go beyond the simple designer trunk show by creating a special hook or themed event.

"I like to find something people want to know about—like feng shui, for example," Zadok says.

To wit: A special event trunk show for giftware brand Lalique Crystal featured an expert's talk on the ancient Chinese placement practice of feng shui as well as Asian cuisine and custom fortune cookies.

Last summer, the retailer rented out a local theater and transported 150 of its best customers via limo-type buses to an evening premiere of the *Sex and the City* movie, tying in with another of Zadok's brands, H. Stern, whose jewelry was featured in the film.

This type of entertainment is the sort of thing trends expert Gerald Celente says will help businesses succeed in what he calls "The Great Recession." Celente is founder and director of the Trends Research Institute in Kingston, N.Y., which, since 1980, has been tracking the world's business, consumer, economic, political, global, social, entertainment and lifestyle trends.

With his finger on the zeitgeist—he's been featured on everything from *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to CNN—Celente says the "knee-jerk sociological assumption" that most people will hunker down at home with high-tech entertainment during tough times is incorrect—at least for most economic groups.

"Many people will be looking for excuses to go out and party and just have a good time," Celente says. "Escapism will be a major trend."

Kai Armstrong, who opened Galatea Fine Jewelry in Milton, Mass., three years ago, and offers a range of price points through companies such as The Touch, Breuning and J.J. Marco, couldn't agree more. She is planning nine special events this year—two more than in 2008.



Penny Preville "Healing Stone" pendants in 18-karat gold from the new "Amulets & Talismans Collection" feature gems such as milky aqua and rock crystal; suggested retail price is between \$3,000 and \$5,000 each. (516) 466-8680 or PennyPreville.com

Last year's hottest events included a "Laura Mercier Day of Beauty," featuring makeup artists from the nearby Boston Neiman Marcus; a wine tasting event, with wine education group Divas Uncorked; and Glam Day, featuring healthy foods, and pilates and yoga instructors.

Though each of the 2008 special events lacked brand tie-ins, Galatea has two special event trunk shows on tap this year: one will be wine-themed, with popular charm manufacturer Pandora bringing wine glass charms for customers. The other will be a Brazilian-themed party, with Brazilian designers Betty Carre and B.B. Intl., featuring South American food, drink and music.

Music is also a draw at Wesche Jewelers, a 31-year-old retailer based in Melbourne, Fla., that opened a new store in 2006 precisely for special events. The store's second floor seats 60 people in a theater-style setting, and it has audio/video equipment as well as a bar. In the past year, Wesche Jewelers has hosted everything from a debutante party to a casual Tommy Bahama-style event, complete with tikis, lemon ice and a hot dog stand.

Wesche's special events usually don't spotlight designers for a trunk show except for perhaps two times a year, during special events such as last year's annual holiday party featuring Frederic Sage jewelry.

As a point of comparison, Reis-Nichols, with locations in Indianapolis and Greenwood, Ind., does more designer trunk shows, but now, it's always with a twist.

"We think the simple trunk show is passé," says Lori Roberts, Reis-Nichols' marketing director. "People are bombarded with a lot of choices, so we believe that we have to give customers another reason to come to the event."


Last year, Reis-Nichols' Roberto Coin trunk show coordinated with the

premiere of Yankee Candle's "Autumn Harvest" scent. The jeweler also hosted a well-attended Marco Bicego event, pairing the brand with Indiana-based handbag company Vera Bradley, which let attendees choose from its signature patterns.

THE ONE-ON-ONE CONNECTION

John Wohlwend, owner of Jack Lewis Jewelers, stopped holding simple trunk shows at his Bloomington, Ill., store some eight years ago and now does them only if combined with something special.

The "something special" includes events such as a luncheon for some 50 women and award-winning jewelry designer Mark Schneider. To kick off the event, Schneider's designs are showcased in a PowerPoint presentation at an upscale restaurant.

"Then, Mark is here the whole weekend and makes one-on-one appointments with the customers so they can work with him individually," Wohlwend says. "This is different from a regular [public appearance] or trunk show." 



Lorraine DePasque is a freelance writer who specializes in fine jewelry and gems.

Tips for hosting a special event trunk show

- ▶▶ Plan at least one thoroughly fun event with a new theme—something customers will tell friends about.
- ▶▶ Organize at least one charitable tie-in with a trunk show. Choosing a worthy local cause can garner good publicity and goodwill.
- ▶▶ Schedule at least one "absolutely artisanal" event featuring single or multiple designers. Offer jewelry-making demonstrations, show-and-tell with unusual gemstones, plus time for the designers to meet customers one-on-one.



18
CATEGORY ANALYSIS:
HOT ROCKS



20
STYLEFILE: BASEL-
BOUND



22
STAR SIGHTINGS:
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