

Gloria Duchin, Inc.
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Make it Personal

Shoppers love the gift-giving potential of personalized ornaments, and the category has become a red-hot seller for Christmas retailers.



Deb & Co.
www.DebandCo.com



The Gift Giant Ltd.
www.giftgiant.com

Personalized ornaments have been among the strongest-selling Christmas categories in recent seasons, and suppliers are responding to increased demand by expanding the depth and breadth of their offerings. Many offer hundreds of SKU's, all of which can be personalized by retail store or mall cart/kiosk personnel with names, dates and messages ranging from "First Wedding Anniversary" to "World's Best Cook." There are designs geared to every possible interest, occupation and occasion and collections to suit every budget.

Retailers say their customers love the idea of being able to give gifts that are specifically for the recipient. Retailers themselves love that shoppers are willing to pay more for personalized pieces and that these ornaments create repeat customers.

"We write on everything we can in our store," says Alexa Lalumia, manager of Christmas by the Sea, a

Christmas shop in Newport, R.I., a tourist area that flourishes in the summertime. "Customers return year after year when they visit the area to select more personalized ornaments."

Ways To Write

Anne Koehler, merchandise manager, Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland, Frankenmuth, Mich., finds that personalized ornaments are "the hottest sellers" among the 6,000 ornaments she stocks at the 135,000-square-foot store.

Demand for personalized ornaments is so strong at Bronner's that the retailer offers a number of different personalization processes. For example, it offers glass ornaments that feature etched text and/or an etched photograph. A laser machine is employed on the premises to etch the glass. Customers



ChemArt Co.
www.chemart.com



may select a photo or have a digital image taken on the premises, and then etched onto glass ornaments. A pigtail light placed through the bull's neck illuminates it.

Another personalization process employed at Bronner's is painting. The customer picks the ornament, and the on-site artist/staffer applies the lettering by hand. The downside is that the writing must dry overnight, requiring the customer to return to take it home.

The most common personalization process — at Bronner's and at most Christmas stores and departments —

employs a permanent marking pen, used by salespeople on the selling floor.

Year-Round Gifts

Suppliers and retailers say shoppers are buying personalized Christmas ornaments year-round as keepsake gifts for weddings and to commemorate anniversaries, vacations or other events. Recipients put them away until holiday time or display them on ornament hangers on their mantels.

"Personalized Christmas ornaments are a multi-million-dollar business for Things Remembered," states Susan Davidson, senior merchandising vice president of the 700-unit mall chain that personalizes 80 percent of all products it sells, and markets ornaments through both its Holiday and Business direct-mail catalogs. There is a fee (starting at \$6) to engrave or personalize items.

Other Christmas gifts and decorations offered include Christmas stockings, stocking holders, Christmas photo albums, Christmas card holders and embroidered Christmas throws.

"Ornaments that can be personalized with a message or sentiment make special holiday gifts," says Davidson, noting that even corporations see a value in getting personal. "Companies also love to give gifts to their employees or customers that have additional value beyond the gift itself."



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Tips for Retailers

- 1** Display lots of personalized ornaments. The more options you offer store browsers, the more likely they are to see one that's perfect for someone on their Christmas list.
- 2** Make sure there are lots of samples with names already written on them. Suppliers say retailers are sometimes tempted to skimp on samples, but that they shouldn't. "Customers can't always visualize how the ornaments will look with names on them," says Deb Allison, president of Deb & Co. She notes also that the sample names can be removed if a store is down to the last one of a specific style.
- 3** Customers like to watch. Jim Casey, owner, Ornament Central, recommends that the department be located in a high-visibility area and that the personalizing be in done in full view of shoppers.
- 4** Don't charge for personalization. Suppliers agree that free personalization boosts sales and creates valuable goodwill. They recommend a prominently displayed "Free Personalization" sign.
- 5** Friendly, competent salespeople are important. Tony Espinosa of Christmas Cove, notes that customers are often unsure exactly what sentiment they want written on an ornament. Often, says Espinosa, they are glad of the input a knowledgeable, helpful staffer can provide.
- 6** The key to attractive handwriting is to write in print and keep the handwriting consistent. Casey of Ornament Central notes that some staffers are initially hesitant to be "writers" but that they shouldn't be. "We haven't found anyone we couldn't teach to do it."

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to focus on the basics — weddings, babies and children. The Gift Giant Ltd. offers several hundred resin ornaments, but “80 percent of retail sales come from a targeted group of family, baby and pet ornaments,” says president Michael Brielmann.

“Baby’s First Christmas styles did better than ever last year,” reports Deb Allison, president of Deb and Co. Other new favorites, says Allison, are personalized ornaments for pets and family-type ornaments in which all the family members’ names are noted.

Pewter and gold-tone ornaments that can hold a child’s school picture or other photo and can be engraved with names, dates, and/or messages, are popular selections from Gloria Duchin, Inc., which also makes both an “Angels of Light” and “Celebrations of Christmas” ornament series.

“Ornaments are being used also as tabletop decorations,” says Dylan Sarchet, sales manager of Joseph K., a



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Supplier Offerings

Vendors say that in general the best-selling personalized ornaments continue

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FEATURE

Honolulu, Hawaii-based supplier with 900 styles who puts easel backs on many ornaments so that they can double as table décor. He says ornaments are getting larger, averaging four-by-four inches in size.

Supplier Alsan Co. Inc.'s personalized ornament customers include hotels and other businesses as well as retailers. Currently popular for the firm are regional motifs that appeal to people in various parts of the country, such as chili peppers, and cowboy hats and boots at Southwestern retailers.

Beyond Ornaments

The success of personalized ornaments has prompted retailers and suppliers to offer personalized products in a variety of Christmas categories. Choices are abundant as well in personalized Christmas stockings for family, friends, and friendly critters. Bronner's, for example, is successful with Christmas stockings that can be embroidered on the

cuff in red thread. Trained staff members personalize the stockings on sewing machines while customers wait.

The popularity of Kurt S. Adler, Inc.'s personalized ornaments — many of them designed by designer Holly Adler — has led the company to debut a vari-

ety of other personalized products including wreath personalizers and personalized lawn decorations. "People love these larger, handwriting-friendly pieces, which can be personalized by the consumers themselves," says Richard Adler, vice president of Kurt S. Adler, Inc. ■



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