

# ***CASHING IN ON GIFT BASKETS***

**by Stephanie Bond**

Need a birthday gift for your mother-in-law? Try a reading gift basket.

Co-worker promoted? Consider sending a reading gift basket.

Friend having surgery? A reading gift basket would be a thoughtful gesture.

Need a customized holiday gift? Anyone would enjoy a reading gift basket.

Gift baskets are big business—some stores specialize in nothing but gift baskets. You can cash in on this booming business, too, by combining what you know best with a format the retail customer seems to love. A romance novel is a nice gift in and of itself, but put a romance novel in a basket with cellophane wrapping around it and a bow on top, and you've really got something!

How can you get started in the service of offering gift baskets to your customers?

- 1) **Publicize.** To let your customers know the service is available, make up several samples and position them around the store.
- 2) **Know your market.** Offer a variety of price ranges; print up a flyer to describe the contents of the different kinds of gift baskets you will offer.
- 3) **Be creative.** Make up different baskets for all occasions. For instance:

***Get-well gift basket:*** 2 romance novels of the customer's choice; a can of chicken soup, and a stoneware mug.

***Congratulations gift basket:*** 2 romance novels, a box of chocolates, and confetti

***New Baby basket:*** 2 romance novels, earplugs, and bottle of gourmet juice

***Holiday gift basket:*** 2 romance novels, an ornament, a candle, and a candy cane

***Birthday gift basket:*** 2 romance novels, a canvas tote, and a noisemaker

***Teen gift basket:*** 2 young adult romance novels, a music CD, and cookies

**(continued)**

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4) **Customize.** Other items you can add to the baskets: bookmarks, T-shirts, bookends, journals, gourmet coffee, stationery, bath salts, scented soap, or gift certificates.

5) **Target the recipient.** If you're asked to select books for the gift basket, try to find out what the receiver likes in terms of TV shows and hobbies. 'Themed' books are good choices. For instance, you could include a romance trilogy, or books centered around the holiday or occasion being celebrated. And don't overlook anthologies for a great variety of stories.

6) **Go for a "look."** Make sure your gift baskets are recognizable from other gift baskets. Perhaps you always use the same color of basket, or the same color of ribbon, or snazzy gift-cards with your store name on them.

7) **Plan ahead.** Make up several baskets ahead of time, leaving openings in the cellophane to slide in the custom contents at the last minute.

8) **Consider delivery.** Offering delivery to a limited area, especially hospitals or office buildings, could be a boon for your new service.

Reading gift basket business might be just the gimmick to attract additional foot traffic into your store. And when it comes to giving books as gifts, remember—a happy ending is appropriate for any occasion! ~**SBond**