

FRONT-END OVERHAUL



Lesson from a steno pad

by Gabe Trahan

Here's a question: Do you sell a lot of those steno pads? *Yes, we do, we are the only one that carries them!* Is the paper in the pads supposed to be light yellowish? Not sure. That raises a few red flags – the quantity of the steno pads on hand was 12 and they are shipped in twelves. The pages have turned from white to different shades of yellow. The phrase “we are the only one that carries them” scares me. If they are popular, you would think someone else would sell them. It's time to research what direction your school supplies sales are going.

By now the back-to-school buying season is close to reaching its peak. Back-to-school season will quickly become “what I forgot to buy season.” Now is the time to take good notes concerning your school supplies sales, which isn't to be confused with your school supplies purchases. “*Gabe, you won't believe how much school supplies we buy!*” is not a report. There is a 50–50 chance that your school supply items are not set up in your point of sale. In many

cases, school supplies are recorded as “miscellaneous sales.” It is important to know what is selling in all departments. Remember, product in your store must do one or all of these three things: make you money (my favorite), attract customers into your store (more than 10 customers!), and enhance your image.

Do not be tricked into crowding a store with inventory because you believe “Our customers expect us to carry everything.” If people stop shopping a pharmacy because the store no longer carries steno pads, then the store has other issues.

After studying school supplies sales, you might decide it's time to downsize the category. If this is the case, consider transitioning from a “Back To School” headquarters to a “Home and Office Supply Center.” Focus on where your sales history is pointing. Reports tend to record healthy sales of writing instruments, specifically for pens, pencils, highlighters, permanent markers, and a few 24-count box of crayons. Mailing supplies

such as self-seal envelopes, security envelopes, padded envelopes, and packing supplies are holding their own. All purpose glue, glue sticks, transparent tape, and shipping tapes are all good basic items.

Packing and shipping supplies do especially well as we get closer to the holidays. Printer/copier paper can be a consistent seller and generate a larger ring at the registers. When downsizing a school supply department cross-merchandise with items such as hand sanitizers, disinfectant wipes, vitamin C, children's multivitamin, and healthy snacks as they attract impulse and companion sales.

After your transitioning and cross-merchandising efforts are complete, you might find yourself with space to fill! That's OK. Let's meet in Boston next month at the NCPA Annual Convention. To learn more, plan on attending these two continuing education sessions: **The Riches are in the Niches** (Saturday, Oct. 6), and the **Pharmacy Front-End Refresh for Under \$1,000** (Tuesday, Oct. 9). You will have plenty of exciting ideas on what to do with any extra space! ■

Gabe Trahan is NCPA's senior director of store operations and marketing. Gabe uses more than 40 years of front-end merchandising experience to help NCPA members increase store traffic and improve profits. Visit www.ncpanet.org/feo to watch videos, read tips, and view galleries of photo examples by Gabe. Follow him on Twitter @NCPAGabe for additional tips.