

## When to Walk Away from a Best-Selling Gift Item

While recently attending a national gift show, I saw what was hailed to be one of the hottest items at the show. It was hard to pay attention to the pitch with all of the oohs and ahhs coming from the crowd. Everyone was giddy over this new hot techy item. This item was indeed intriguing and I wanted one...I just didn't want to ever sell one.

The item was a cardboard virtual reality viewer that works with your smartphone. The salesman gave his explanation of how to use it: "First, you will need to go to the App Store and download the app, then fold the cardboard into a box shape and place your smartphone into the front holding sleeve that you just formed. That's it! You are done. Enjoy!" Using the demo box and demo phone, I enjoyed a virtual roller coaster ride. The pitch continued: "I bet you could sell these all day long for \$19.99 in your town!"



I always find it interesting when someone says this item will sell well in my town. It's as if everyone interested in a cardboard virtual reality viewer moved to my town. No doubt it will be a great seller, but it was best to walk away. As a seasoned gift buyer, I learned the hard way: if you have to explain it and you don't have anyone walking on the floor with the sole purpose of showing people how an item works, then stick to selling something simple, like candles. Most people know how to work a candle.

### TIPS FOR BUYERS

Think twice before you invest in an item that needs an explanation. Don't get caught up in the excitement of the day. Here is a general rule of thumb: if you are looking at an item, ask yourself, "If a person picks up the packaging, does he or she have to ask what this item does?" If the answer is yes, walk away. Or, become an expert at making detailed signs and be ready to answer repeated requests for demos.

Also ask yourself if the item displays well – meaning, will it look good on your style of shelving? I once bought way too many toy train sets. The box was less than 2 inches tall, 28 inches long, and 18 inches deep. It was a great value. The only problem was, my widest shelf was 15 inches deep and 48 inches long, and the box hung over the shelf. The box was too narrow to stand up on its own and too long to double face on a shelf, and had to lay flat, nearly unnoticed, stacked on a base shelf. However, it did sell well lying flat on a closeout table. Think before you buy!

*P.S. – I checked an online store where you can now get a viewer for \$13.99. Cool!*

*-- Gabe Trahan, NCPA Senior Director of Store Operations and Marketing  
NCPA's Front-End Overhaul*