Countdown to Christmas

> On the first day of Christmas my florist gave to me ... a 20 percent discount on my favorite candle! The melody may sound off, but a Christmas-themed promotion at Broadway Floral Home and Garden in Portland, Ore., has customers clicking, purchasing and making an extra stop at the store during one of the florist’s busiest seasons.

Five years ago Doug Fick and his team started their “24 Days of Christmas” promo, and the initiative is going stronger than ever. Here’s how it works: On the first day of December, Fick uploads an advent calendar-style graphic online, with interactive buttons on Dec. 1 to Dec. 24. When customers click on a date, the day’s special is revealed. Customers can’t click ahead, and while they can click on past dates, those promos show up as “expired” and create an immediate “Oh darn, I missed it!” reaction.

The time constraint creates a sense of urgency and excitement — that critical “call to action,” Fick said — and that’s important to his overarching goal of increasing in-store business during the homestretch of the year, which accounts for about 18 percent of total sales. The promos themselves are critical to the success of the effort, and Fick has found that gift items work best (candles, accessories, jewelry, etc.) discounted by at least 20 percent (“10 percent really isn’t worth a customer’s time to stop in,” he said). Buy one or two items, and get one free deals also are popular selections.

The appeal of the program from Fick’s perspective is two-fold: He’s able to promote his many non-floral offerings to customers and get shoppers into his store. (This year, some daily promos will be redeemable online, but in the past almost all of them have been good for in-store purchase only.) It’s also a flexible effort; Fick generally plans the promos in 10-day batches and can adjust them to better reflect what he wants to push as the end of the year draws closer.

“It’s hard to say definitively that any particular item drove sales that day,” Fick said, “but I know people are coming in, and it resonates with our key demographic,” which is women 18 years old and up. Some of his less tech-savvy customers even call in daily to find out what the featured deal will be. This year, Fick and his team also will be adding a teaser-element to the annual special, with a week’s worth of sneak peeks to customers on the store’s mailing list — all the better to build excitement and put that twinkle in holiday shoppers’ eyes.