



*I'm a great
last-minute
gift idea!*

Tiny Treasures

Small, consumable items are a popular choice with gift-focused shoppers and those on a budget.

By Barb Kastens

If you're a store owner or manager who tracks consumer buying habits in your retail establishment, you've probably noticed a distinct change in what your customers have been purchasing lately. In equestrian shops across the country, as well as in mainstream retail, store inventories have gone a bit topsy turvey—what was hot just a couple of years ago is not, and vice versa. If you've acted on that bit of information, you've no doubt adjusted what and how much you're ordering.

Recent retail data suggests, a bit surprisingly considering the financial pickle most of the world has found itself in, that consumers have not stopped buying. (That is especially so where giving is

concerned—even people on a tight budget still want to be able to give a nice gift when the opportunity presents itself.) It's what they're buying that's changed. Ever heard the phrase "good things come in small packages?" You might want to adopt that as your mantra, at least for the time being, since sales of smaller-ticket items such as consumables have gone through the roof.

So, just what are consumables? Food and beverages come to mind most readily, but really, they're anything that gets used up. The health and beauty industry is full of consumables such as lotion, shampoo, and even over-the-counter medications. Fuels such as gasoline also fit into this category.

Consumable products are a great match

for stores that want to answer customer demand for affordable items. They're small, inexpensive, and people love giving and getting them as gifts. They also make great impulse buys, and with the holiday season just around the corner, they are excellent last-minute gift ideas.

"For retailers, it's kind of a no-brainer. They're easy-to-merchandise, point-of-sale items," said Cara Jones, owner of CJ Sardi, maker of fine equestrian-themed jewelry. Recently, Jones and her creative consultant Matthew Weinberg decided to launch 24 Carrot Gourmet, a brand extension of the company that specializes in "snacks, sweets and treats—for people!"

"People are still feeling the effects of the economic downturn, and we thought, food