

PLBuyer



The Authority on Private Label Retailing

Winn-Dixie Comes Out Fighting

Winn-Dixie looks to sprout seeds
of private label success.

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Opportunity Knocks



Here's how to use instructional selling to increase PL sales.

Consumers always want more. Whether it's the newest, fastest smart phone or more pepperoni on their pizza, and the same is true in the world of food retailing where a stumbling economy and an increased number of consumers feeling pressed for time as well as money provides a good opportunity for retailers to incorporate instructional selling into their marketing arsenal.

THE BENEFITS

Private label products can benefit from instructional selling that explains the quality and value the product provides, moving the conversation away from price alone, says Jeff Weidauer, vice president of marketing and strategy for Little Rock, Ark.-based Vestcom, a marketing consulting firm.

"With private label products, anytime you can get the product on the tongue of the consumer is a great thing," agrees David Brown, vice president of retail sales for Allens Inc., a Siloam Springs, Ark.-based provider of canned and frozen vegetables. "Because of margin constraints and such, retailers really don't have the opportunity to advertise their private label products outside of the store, so trial is the key."

"Once you get a consumer trying the products and they understand it's just as good as the national brand or better, then you've hooked them and they'll be loyal to the private brands."

Another benefit of instructional selling is to create in-store excitement. "Anytime you can engage people, it creates excitement," says Richard George,

professor of food marketing at St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia. "There are some people that still think of private label as generic; using this method [instructional selling] allows retailers to do some very creative things to differentiate both their products and the stores," he says.

THE BEST TIME

"Figuring out the best time to hold demonstrations depends on the product, its intended audience and the best time for a given store," says Weidauer.

Doing the demonstrations during peak shopping times will allow retailers to reach the most people, adds Brown. "Nowadays, to be most convenient, retailers should also share their demonstrations in social media spaces. That way, consumers can access them when it's convenient for them."

On the other hand, when stores are most crowded, for example on Saturdays, may not be the best time because people are in a hurry, says George. "Retailers really need to promote these types of activities and make them destinations; a reason for people to come into the store. Let shoppers know that on Thursday between noon and 3 p.m. you're cooking up such and such or Tuesday between 10 and noon you're going to tell them how they can do a great job in cleaning up their kitchen."

WHICH PRODUCTS?

Those products that are least understood in terms of their value proposition versus a national brand will benefit the most from instructional selling.

"While determining our recipes for our Apron's Simple Meals program, we take into account the whole store and overall best value for our customers," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Lakeland, Fla.-based Publix Super Markets Inc. "We try to create meals around items that our customer will be particularly drawn to, such as sale items for that week."

It all comes down to retailers targeting their core consumers, adds Brown. "If you've got older shoppers, you're obviously going to cater to them. I think you have to fish where the fish are at with these types of programs and understand who's shopping your stores. One store may be different than the other and you have to get very granular."

Additionally, retailers should look at items with which they have a point of difference, says George. "Retailers aren't limited to just food items either. If you have a sustainable paper towel, put it next to the Bounty to show consumers that not only are you helping the environment, but you're also solving a functional problem as well."

MEASURING SUCCESS

Loyalty tracking is the best way for retailers to monitor the success of instructional selling methods for private label, says Weidauer. "But, just a quantifiable sales lift will help to determine success as well. Ad hoc research, i.e. asking shoppers if they found the information helpful, is also a good way to refine the message."

Success also can be measured by looking at indicators such as store

traffic and attitudinal measures, says George. "Retailers should look at what people think of their store and how it changes the image and whether that affects preference or behavior in any way. It's too easy to just say 'we didn't sell much so we're not going to do this again.' That should not be the only criteria."

Besides the obvious methods such as cooking demonstrations and videos, there are a plethora of other ideas for retailers to consider that will help create excitement around their private label products. Retailers also should think beyond the four walls of the store and go to schools, gyms, garden clubs, fairs and festivals, trade shows, etc.; anywhere they have an interactive audience, for instructional demonstrations.

"There are a lot of different avenues out there that people are participating in," says Brown. "I think there's a big opportunity for every retailer now to take advantage of that." **PLB**

Five Keys to Effectively Use Instructional Selling

1. Keep the demonstration simple and easy to access.
2. Strive to connect with consumers on a personal level.
3. Engage customers.
4. Solve a problem for customers.
5. Point out the unique value of the products, beyond price.