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Ask Bill: Give Them What They Want

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Q: We're told we must sell more to each customer. How do we bring in new product lines that will start selling immediately? How do we get the team to embrace them and introduce them to customers?

A: This question is compiled from questions by three garden centers that feel the need for more sales, more dollars to cover increasing overhead costs and maybe raises for the team (including the boss). Here are three steps to accomplish this, consistent with their unique circumstances.

- **Step One:** What do your existing customers need or value that they don't currently get from you? The customer buys something when they see what's in it for them. If you can tap into an existing need/demand, the sales process becomes easier and quicker.

- **Step Two:** How do you get your team on board and committed to selling through the new products? One retailer is still paying full health care costs for employees and their families, but last year they felt they had to stop. When the owners met with the 18 full-time, year-round employees, they explained, "We're bringing in this new product line. It represents new business. If we can generate monthly sales of \$X, we won't have to change our insurance policy." Today management reports they've averaged that volume over the first 12 months. Their insurance program continues unchanged. It's an interesting way to build support for a new product. The fear of loss is unfortunately a bigger motivator than the promise of gain. Is there something in this lesson you can emulate with your team?

Many retailers erroneously think the team will share management's excitement about new products. Consider introducing a new line to your team from a customer's perspective. Remind your team their job is to fulfill customers' needs. Discuss how the new product will make customers' lives easier, more beautiful, more enjoyable. Focus all discussions on the customers' experiences generated by the new product.

At a team meeting, award a \$5 coffee card to the team member who comes up with the best single sentence describing the new product's customer benefit. Award another card to the person with the best one-line introduction of the new product, so when the customer says, "Just looking," they can respond, "You might want to look at this new _____ because _____." Require each team member to participate. Insist people become aware and informed.

- **Step Three:** Communicate the benefits to the customer so they'll actively, and almost effortlessly, buy up your new product. This means signage, displays, email, social media postings and testimonials. Get the word out about

this new product's advantages.

This will require people from different departments or store areas becoming engaged in storewide promotion of the new product. Most garden centers have bird food and hardware inside with bird-friendly plants outside. What's the customer benefit here? People who buy birdhouses want birds in their yard.

For instance, if a customer looks at foxglove, bee balm, butterfly bush or other hummingbird-friendly plants, show hummingbird feeders in the same display area. Cross merchandising (displays showing various products from different departments) accomplishes that. It can be a "live, hands-on display" if you have the space.

Photographs/posters/signage showing the product variety and how it improves your customers' lives also work. If your organization has strong department fiefdoms (or silos), blow-up that concept in favor of customer-centric orientation. Your customer doesn't care about department boundaries.

In the 1800s, master retailer Marshall Field said, "Give the lady what she wants!" Today, we should "give the customers what will benefit them, even if they don't yet know it." **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.