

TURNING OVER SOME NEW (300 ODD) LEAVES

Make the most of the New Year's fresh start with catalogues and account reviews.

BY JANE SMITH

For most of us our new catalogues for the coming year will have been delivered either just before Christmas or right at the beginning of January. Some of us still work for organisations that will have a traditional catalogue launch and/or conference and others of us will just be expected to get on with the job in hand which is to sell, sell, sell. But how is it best to go about making the most out of your new selling tool, your 2006 catalogue? And I don't just mean the paper version either. There is a great potential and opportunity to either convert customers to on-line ordering or to review their on-line purchasing and point out to them better ways to work.

TOP TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CATALOGUE LAUNCH

Familiarise yourself with your new catalogue. What has changed? Is the layout and running order different? What has come out and what new products have gone in?

Look through the new products and choose half a dozen that appeal to you. These can be used as conversation openers when you go into your customers to present and/or follow up the catalogue.

You know your customers best. Plan your calls and make sure you have something interesting and relevant to them to talk about in the appointment. Look for products that will interest them. If appropriate mark up relevant pages to review together. Account Reviews are a great way of working with your customer to help save them money on their current spend while at the same time gain overall revenue spend – see our section below on account reviews.

Check to see whether there are any manufacturers' promotions running alongside the catalogue launch period, what's on offer and which customers might be interested. Or can you offer any free samples? It doesn't have to be much but it will be much remembered.

Is your company running a launch offer? For example, you could offer a new product at a special price for any orders you take over £100 for the first week?

Make your customer's life as easy as possible. Make sure you get a copy of your catalogue to everyone in the organisation that needs one. Encourage your contact to let you provide more copies. Explain that this will help ensure that there is no leakage and that people in their organisation will 'comply' and go through them if they make it easy. If your customer doesn't already have a pre-printed order form then offer to put one together. This also provides an opportunity to review product mix and margins. Consider the advantages of converting your customer to on-line ordering.

OPEN DAYS / LAUNCH DAYS

In large customer organisations it could well help your contact to implement the catalogue and any changes through the organisation

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by holding an open/launch day or days. This can be done formally by holding specific sessions in a meeting room or, informally by having a small stand in the reception area or canteen/rest area at lunchtime. Again make things more interesting by holding a prize draw or competition.

To make sure that your customer uses the new catalogue straight away, why not offer to take away their old one for recycling?

Finally, it's not just a case of distributing the catalogue within your existing customers. What is your strategy for new business? Think about how your new 2006 catalogue can be used to go after new business.

ACCOUNT REVIEWS

For existing customers we recommend the very best use of your new catalogue is to make it an excuse to do a full account review. It will require some preparation on your part but will prove well worth it.

Your objective is to demonstrate to your customer a saving on current spending and at the same time capture a higher level of spend overall. So how is this best done?

First of all prioritise and plan customer visits. Account reviews take around an hour, so book well in advance and explain to your customer what you want to discuss and how long it will take. It is probably better to do the review face to face, but a telephone review can still prove worthwhile if you cannot get an appointment.

PREPARATION

Analyse your customers' spend over the last six months in a number of ways to understand their buying habits.

By frequency of spend and average order value – do they order every day or once per month. It will save you money if they order less often but in higher volumes. Is there a way you can encourage this? Could you offer an incentive to do this? >>

Monthly spend by product category, for example, paper, writing instruments, computer supplies, presentation products, machines, furniture and general stationery. You can make this analysis as broad or as detailed as you like. The objective is to find gaps. What don't they buy from you? How could you win this business? This typically happens on categories like computer supplies or furniture where they might be buying from a specialist because either they think it is cheaper or they are not aware that you can supply them.

Monthly spend by gross margin, by category to make sure you are making money on the account and where improvements may be needed or could be made.

Own brand purchases against proprietary. Does your customer buy any own brand or mostly own brand? This analysis will help when you look at opportunities for switch-selling.

Get to grips with your new catalogue. What's come out and what new products have gone in? Where does this affect your customer? Has your own brand product range been extended? This will help with the next step.

Put together a list of objectives for each key customer based upon

Once you have your objectives plan the review by making notes and even putting together a proposal you can leave with your customer to demonstrate what you are proposing and why

what you have found out from the analysis and bearing in mind what you want to achieve. This could be to increase the amount of own brand they buy to increase overall margin, or to win a specific category of business such as computer supplies. It could be a combination of a number of things. Look for specific opportunities that are relevant to the customer. You know your customer best, what is it they will be looking for and what will specifically interest them. If appropriate mark up relevant pages

in the catalogue so that you can review them together.

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IMPLEMENTATION

The structure of the review is up to you but here are some suggested headings:

- Current spend and how the customer could save money.
- Fill the gaps – what should they be buying from you that they are not?
- Range selling and up-selling – use the meeting as an opportunity to ask about the customer's plans for the coming year. Are they upgrading any equipment, moving offices, expanding or offering new services themselves? Any changes in their circumstances could be good business opportunities for you.

NEW PRODUCTS

Sell your company – you can use this more 'formal' meeting to reiterate the company's credentials and 'unique selling points'. Make sure you update your customer with any new developments within your

own organisation. This will show professionalism and give them more reasons to stay with you.

AND FINALLY... BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY:

Make sure you understand the service levels your customer has been receiving and any issues there may be now or in the past. Your customer will certainly know about them.

Likewise, make sure you understand any issues there are or may have been on the financial side of your relationship including any outstanding invoices or queries etc.

Your customer's say is vital. Allow for time for your customer to ask questions and provide feedback

Make sure you create a situation to book another appointment in the future.

As a result of the meeting make sure you do what you say you're going to do.

Your customers want you to provide a complete solution and if you demonstrate that you care and understand their business they are more likely to turn to you for answers before moving their business elsewhere if a competitor approaches them. Happy selling! ■