

Brands fight turf war in field of retail-side training



Marketers' new weapon of choice is state-of-the-art training techniques for retail partners as companies jostle to make their brand top dog in the sales stakes

By Lucy Fisher

Miller Brands trains bar staff to offer people premium beers

Trade marketers and their retail partners are banding together to help each other towards the ultimate business goal of sales. Unilever illustrated this earlier in the year when it invited staff from a convenience store and petrol forecourt to work together with its sales reps in an attempt to boost summer ice cream sales with its Wall's 'Six Steps to Sell' campaign.

Holly Ashton, trade category and marketing executive for ice cream at Unilever UK, says that by advising its retail partners on the positioning of its products in-store, its ice creams achieved a 95 per cent increase in sales on the year

before, with a 130 per cent sales increase for the Wall's brands. The initiative clearly worked on a number of levels.

"It's about dialogue, trust and a team effort," says Ashton. "Out-of-home advertising has reduced over the past 10 years as a category, so we wanted to show [retailers] how our sales team is there to help."

Such is the power of customer training and communication efforts by manufacturers, that in many categories it can turn into something of a turf war as suppliers jostle for attention among retailers. According to Simon Little, director of

recruitment and development at Phones4u, its state-of-the-art Fort Dunlop Training Academy is a prime example of the battleground this area of marketing can become.

"The likes of Sony, Samsung, Nokia, HTC and Apple all compete," he says, describing how the brands try to outdo each other with their training room fit-outs in a bid to impress the recruits. This is great news for Phones4u, which benefits from a constantly evolving training facility, but very expensive for the manufacturers.

HTC head of marketing for UK and Ireland ►

figurefocus

95
per cent

of organisations have a training budget, according to CIPD

5,760
pints

Increase in pints sold in one year after Molson Coors' 'beer champions' training at a customer outlet

95
per cent

Growth in sales of Unilever's ice creams after advising retail partners where to place products in-store

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viewpoint



James Lawton-Hill
Head of marketing
Brother UK (printer
manufacturer)

Training is very important in our indirect sales model. We need to put knowledge in our partners' hands. We mainly do this via a partner portal, with product and marketing information. It's an e-learning platform, with videos, interactive elements, PowerPoint decks and Q&A sessions.

We've also started to use apps and given our team iPads, to ensure they have the latest information. The screen on a tablet is large enough to be viewed by a group of people and an online portal on a desktop makes it easier to access how-to guides when you're on the phone to a customer. It's about getting a message across effectively without physically having to be there.



► James Atkins says: "The one-upmanship has got to stop." He claims that he is investing in training sales people more than ever before, partly as a way of achieving stand-out for retailers when competing with other brands with bigger budgets. He says that the training has to be engaging, even entertaining, and that HTC is moving away from newsletters and PowerPoint presentations towards video, mobile apps and augmented reality.

"The competitors are all trying to own the relationship with the retail and call centre staff," he says. For example, HTC has developed a TV channel and web portal along with instructional videos that describe the benefits to consumers, which would apply to many of its products. Without attention to this kind of content, he warns, "there's a danger that when you're being product-specific you'll just be repeating yourself."

Atkins advises offering 'snacking' content for training purposes, in a variety of formats that recognise different learning styles. Like Unilever, HTC stresses the importance of creating a relationship and inviting the retailers to contribute.

"It's about user-generated content too," says Atkins. "We say, if you've found a better way of demonstrating a particular feature, then show us." He claims that this gets a high level of response and participation from retail partners and means that essentially "our customers are training themselves".

One area that causes a headache for many training co-ordinators is the use of rewards or incentives for retail or distribution partners. "If you're having to offer major incentives, then there's something wrong," says Atkins. "As with many areas of marketing, it's about pull, not push."

Sony Mobile marketing director for north-west Europe Catherine Cherry agrees. She says that rewarding partners for undergoing training is

"The suppliers are all trying to own the relationship with the retail and call centre staff"

James Atkins, HTC

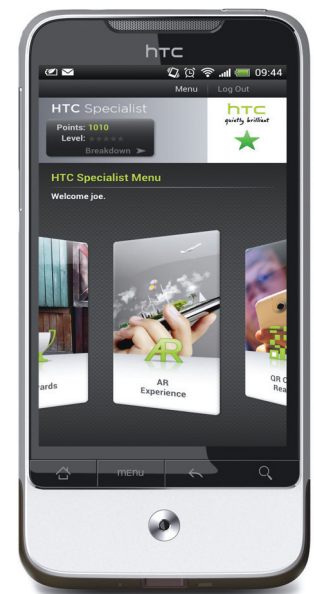
often more effective if it's done little and often. Again, this is an area where brands can try to outdo each other, resulting in a lot of cost that is often unnecessary.

"We ask staff exactly how and when they want to be rewarded," says Cherry. "There are several ways of winning, rather than one large prize at the end of each month." Small rewards delivered more frequently can also help with brand recall, especially if staff redeem or collect their rewards via their handsets or in branded environments, she argues.

In terms of delivery formats, it's not surprising that brands are using a variety of e-learning techniques. Digital methods can enable more frequent, if not real-time, updating of training materials. Often, such technologies can reduce costs or reach large groups in short time frames. For this year's bartender competition run by brewer Miller Brands UK, director of customer marketing Sam Rhodes says that all the modules were done online. "When bartenders see a lot of paper to wade through, they don't react well. These people are working long hours."

Rupert Cook, an ex-trade marketer for Orange, who now works with Miller at field marketing agency Gekko, says he has noticed training ►

**Above: Phones4u has a training academy for its store staff
Right: HTC uses augmented reality to train retail partners**



toptips creating effective training

- **Training needs to be about your brand, not just your products.**
- **Devise ways of reaching more people more effectively, conveying brand principles at every interaction.**
- **Build advocacy and create commonality of purpose. Ensure everyone feels part of a wider team.**
- **Reinforce training. A one-off session is never enough.**
- **Offer training in a variety of formats. You need both face-to-face and online.**

Source: David Thorp, director of research and professional development at CIM

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Q&A



David Strang
Founder and
managing director
Wicked Vision (toy
manufacturer)

Marketing Week (MW): What approach works best for you when training your retail partners?

David Strang (DS): We put our own demonstration team in stores to showcase our boomerangs at key tourist attractions like Hamleys, Harrods, the Science Museum and Madame Tussauds. We can't do this with every product but it's the best way of having the items merchandised how you want. It gives you complete control and for us it's been hugely successful. The retailers make a lot of money and it doesn't cost them extra. The volumes we sell in this way are immense.

MW: What about doing demos online or on TV?

DS: Nothing can compare to a physical demo. We did a TV ad campaign for our inflatable boxing gloves as the idea is so simple that there's less need for a demo. Often the decision comes down to distribution. It may be that we'll only demo in two or three stores but we choose stores where the sales are high.



MW: How have new technologies affected the way you conduct your training?

DS: Video, YouTube and Skype all have big scope. We do training videos and these work a treat. We shoot video footage on cameras and phones. We did a training session with the staff at Toys R Us in New York recently and filmed me carrying out the training. I take it upon myself to train the staff. You want your training to have a lasting effect. Videos and so on can help here.

MW: What's your advice to other manufacturers or suppliers?

DS: Be realistic. It's your product, your passion. Staff will come and go and the enthusiasm dies a lot quicker than you'd like it to. You need refreshers or sales will drop. Retailers ultimately want your products to sell from their shelves with as little effort as possible. You have to step up and do that job. Retailers have their own problems. I think that's why many suppliers fail.

Toy manufacturer Wicked Vision uses its own demo team in stores like Hamleys



► has become less about features and more about how to increase average basket value. Cross-selling and up-selling techniques are receiving increased emphasis, as vendors such as pubs and bars seek to push up value sales by convincing consumers to trade up. Miller's Rhodes says this is a particular focus for the premium world beers that the brewer sells.

But simply relaying facts to service staff that can be read off the packaging is not helpful. Tim Bedward, consumer sales manager at printer manufacturer Epson, believes that real-time advice will become critical and that training methods will be delivered increasingly via tablets or other devices. In this way, those on the shop floor will be able to update their knowledge quickly, in order to be as relevant and useful as possible to the consumer.

"The training element evolves constantly," says Bedward. "The onus is on us to provide a level of training that is valuable to staff and will allow us to achieve cut-through on the shop floor. It's about ensuring that the brand is represented well at every touchpoint."

Obviously, to provide a high level of service, sales professionals need to be knowledgeable

"The onus is on us to provide training that's valuable to staff and allows us to achieve cut-through on the shop floor"

Tim Bedward, Epson

about the products or services they are trying to sell. Tony Guy, beers, wines and spirits manager at Tesco's Silverburn store in Glasgow, says that a tasting session organised by brewer Molson Coors was particularly useful (see case study, page 34).

Guy says: "We get questions all the time so it's good to be able to recommend something." He adds that working in the largest Tesco in Scotland means that it is very helpful when reps come in to ensure their own sections are

well stocked and up to date, especially over the Christmas period.

However, it's not always the case that retailers are receptive to visits from trade marketers offering help or training. Professor Gino Van Ossel of the retail and trade marketing research centre at Vlerick Business School in Leuven, Belgium, says that retailers are becoming less keen to allow staff time out to attend training. Across all markets, he says, interactions between shoppers and staff are declining, largely because consumers are arming themselves with information online before visiting a store. "With product training, it can be impossible to keep up, so there is a need for a more focused approach," he warns.

Mark Nicholson, senior marketing manager at Digital UK, the body formed to assist consumers with the digital TV switchover, saw first-hand the effect of reduced headcount and resources at retail and distribution outlets. While helping to deliver Digital UK's switchover campaign over the past five years, he noticed that the staff and resources retailers could devote to customer training were diminishing as a result of the economic downturn. It meant its training support had to change. ►

casestudy molson coors

The trade marketing strategy at global brewer Molson Coors, which owns a wide portfolio of beer brands such as Carling, Cobra and Coors Light, focuses on reps being knowledgeable and passionate about the category as a whole. The aim is to convert this insight and enthusiasm into cash sales by providing consumer-facing sales staff with expert knowledge that will impress beer drinkers.

Brand activation manager Jenny Elliott was chosen for her role partly because the way she spoke about the category was noticed by her boss. She is now responsible for training a team of around 50 Molson Coors employees in Scotland.

"Some of our staff have been here 10 to 15 years and may be resistant to me telling them to do it differently, to focus on category and not just price," she admits. "Yes, trade customers want to talk about price but first it's about listening to them and learning about their business. Then it's about giving them the right brands that'll help their business grow."

Elliott says she encourages everyone to be seen as a category expert and to give advice on Molson Coors' entire beer menu, which will be relaunched next year. "Team members need background knowledge to build a good beer menu, rather than advising on three Czech beers that all taste more or less the same," she explains. "Offering tasting sessions is key. If you don't know what a spirit or a wine tastes like, how can you talk about it?"

Often customers come into a bar having watched a programme on TV about food and drink, says Elliott. Very often they know more than the barman does: "For consumers there's so much information available now that the bar owner really needs to be knowledgeable. It might be that a woman comes into the bar



Molson Coors shows beer ingredients to educate consumer-facing staff

who has not thought about having a beer with her prawns, but a particular beer is recommended and the staff can explain why."

Alec Trousdale, general manager at The Queens Arms pub in Edinburgh, recalls one instance when his Coors rep brought examples of the grain that a beer was made from, along with other ingredients such as dried orange peel, coriander and porridge oats. "This made a lasting impression," he says. "The best way to make products move is to make sure your staff feel comfortable talking about them."



► "The most important thing is to adapt to the needs of the retailer or distributor," he says. "The groups we trained could be one person on a shop floor or 50 in a designated room."

Van Ossel at Vlerick Business School describes the need to offer solutions "of a different kind" – for instance, improved digital marketing with increased reviews and information online; manufacturers sending their staff to conduct demonstrations (see Q&A page 32); and shops within shops, staffed by suppliers. "There is a big difference between general training and product-training," he explains. "What if I decide not to sell that product anymore?"

Mobile phone handset manufacturers and brewers still place a high value on trade marketer training, he says, because these products are generally not bought in a self-service environment. Van Ossel believes that we will see smaller stores, which cannot afford to compete on price, going for a clear service positioning. In this case, training provided by manufacturers needs to be at its most adaptive to the retail environment.

"It's about more creative ways of getting the brand message across," he says. "There is a need to do something special for the retailer." ●

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