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Maintenance Supplies



Updated: March 19th, 2007 10:17 AM PDT

The Successful Demo



By [Robert Kravitz](#)

Many young people do not realize that through the late 1950s vacuum cleaners were usually sold door-to-door. In those days, most women were homemakers and the vacuum cleaner salesperson could knock on someone's door and ask to demonstrate the vacuum cleaner. Because vacuuming was often a daily chore and thus considered quite cumbersome, these salespeople were often welcomed and the homemakers proved to be a very receptive audience.

In fact, this was so common and so many salespeople were successful at selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door that in one episode of *I Love Lucy*, Lucy decides to do it herself for some extra money. However, Lucy soon learns that demonstrating a vacuum cleaner proves more difficult than originally believed.

After going door-to-door and receiving several rejections, Lucy believes she has found a ready buyer. She throws a

pile of dirt onto the woman's carpet in order to show the effectiveness of her vacuum cleaner — only to find when she plugs the machine into the wall that the power is off. The rest of the episode has Lucy cleaning the mess up by hand, dejected, unhappy and realizing that selling vacuum cleaners takes skill.

For distributors and manufacturers' reps, Lucy's demo may not be so funny. Many distributors have eagerly gone to appointments to demonstrate a cleaning chemical, tool or piece of equipment only to encounter one problem and surprise after another. In this article, three experts — a corporate trainer, the vice-president of a Green Cleaning chemical company and a representative of a leading buying group — share their tips on how to make a demo successful and one that can lead to a sale.

The demo as a challenge

Mike Sawchuk is vice-president and general manager of Enviro-Solutions. Sawchuk has been working with distributors for more than 15 years and one of his key responsibilities today is as a trainer, helping his company's distributors improve their sales success when marketing environmentally-preferable cleaning products.

"The first thing I tell my distributors is that whatever you sell the customer on is what you will lose them on," says Sawchuk. "If you sell them on just price and someone comes in with a lower price, you're out the door."

Instead, Sawchuk says distributors must "bundle" the benefits of their offerings. In so doing, if another distributor can sell a comparable product for less, for example, there are still other variables the customer must consider. Indeed, Sawchuk says the key marketing variables or components that must be bundled together include: price; performance; protection of people and the environment (for Green Cleaning products); and value of the sales rep. "So many distributors sell on just one dimension," he says. "To be successful, you've got to sell on multiple dimensions."

Sawchuk also advises distributors to never do a demo, at least in the way it is customarily performed. Instead, he finds side-by-side comparisons more effective. "Have the customer take you to a problem cleaning area and have the cleaning worker use his or her current cleaning product to try and clean the area," says Sawchuk. "Then have the cleaning worker try your product and compare the results."

It is very important that the cleaning worker, and not the distributor, perform the challenge, according to Sawchuk. This way the customer has conducted his or her own side-by-side comparison of the product. "What happens here, they did their own product demo," says Sawchuk. "No salesperson sold them on anything. If the demo is successful, they sold it to themselves."

Make it look easy

Bryan Thomson is the corporate trainer for U.S. Products. His specialty is working with distributors as well as end-users, instructing them on ways to address various floor and carpet cleaning issues as well as market his company's products.

He has some advice for conducting demonstrations. "I always start with the basics," says Thomson. "If possible, I check out the area first where the equipment demonstration will take place and make sure we have electric power and water nearby to run the machine."

Also, Thomson says it is very important to find out what kind of soil and floor will be involved with the demo. "If it's a heavily soiled carpet, a spot remover may be necessary to remove spots before extraction, so the distributor should bring along a spot removal kit," Thomson says.

Demonstrating floor care equipment can become more complicated. According to Thomson, the distributor must know what type of soil is present, what type of flooring will be cleaned and if finish has been applied to the floor. A "scratch test" of the floor in an inconspicuous area may be necessary to help answer these questions.

"Once the demo begins, the goal is always to show 'ease of use' when operating the equipment," says Thomson. "If the equipment is doing its job, the customer then wants to see that the equipment is not only effective, but easy to use as well."

Be prepared

"I tell our member distributors that there are two rules of thumb when doing a demo," says Mike Nelson, vice-president of marketing for Pro-Link. "First, be prepared and second, control the demo."

According to Nelson, one way to be prepared is to bring your own debris. "Show the customer how the product/equipment can remove different types of soils that you have brought along," he says. "And expect the customer to ask you to demo the product on a large area. But bring just enough product to keep the demo within manageable parameters."

The customer may want not only a large area to be cleaned, but also the product demonstrated on the worst problem

areas. "This sets you up for failure," Nelson says. He adds that selecting the area to demonstrate the equipment is part of controlling the demo. "Select an area that is 'fair' and typical of the building," says Nelson. He also advises distributors leave some product or even a piece of equipment behind so the cleaning crew can use it. As the crew uses the product, they often sell themselves on it.

Finally, Nelson advises distributors to "ask for the order" if the demo was successful. "If the customer still hedges and won't make a commitment, send some samples and offer training sessions to the cleaning crew," he says. "You've got to earn their business and this also shows them you are a value-added distributor. You will be there after the sale to make sure that they are happy and that it helps keep their facility clean and healthy."

Robert Kravitz is a 30-year veteran of the cleaning industry, author of four books on the industry, a Jan/San writer and marketing consultant.

Quick Tips

- Show the customer that the product has many features and benefits.
- Make it a cleaning challenge.
- Check the basics first. Is there power and water available to demonstrate the machine?
- Know what kind of soil you are dealing with.
- If demonstrating an extractor, bring carpeting spotting tools just in case.
- Know what kind of flooring the demo will be conducted on.
- Be prepared for all situations.
- Control the demo.
- Earn the customer's business by providing value-added services.
- Ask for the order.

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