

Driving Sales by Engaging the Consumer

Grocery shopping today is not just about picking up the items that are needed in the household it is often about learning more about those items to determine if they want to buy them. Over 90% of consumers now read the label for a variety of reasons. Some people are looking for things to avoid, some for ingredients or attributes they want more of, others just want to be able to compare competitive products. Whatever their purpose they are trying to learn more about those products.

What does this have to do with engaging the consumer you ask? A large part of the educational process is on the package but the retailers can help with that educational process by encouraging more in-store activities that are interactive and engage the consumer.

Engaging the consumer, may it be brand or retailer, is very important in attracting, building and maintaining a loyal consumer. In other words, if the consumer is engaged, meaning if they are interacting with the products, this will create a more educational if not more enjoyable experience and they will come back. The most common engagement is through in-store demonstrations which are nearly always in the form of sampling - the “try before you buy”. What about those products that are not about how great they taste or that are not foods or beverages? If we look at this activity from a more educational perspective it should be viewed more as simply getting the product in the mouth or hands of the consumer. Providing more information, or other visuals will help to make the demonstration more effective and ultimately more educational. Have you ever been to a fair where a new kitchen gizmo is being demonstrated - “it slices, it dices...”, or a new floor cleaner or detergent? Crowds often gather to ooh and ah at the wonders of the demonstration and inevitably people will buy these gizmos that will end up sitting in the closet unused. This was all because they were dazzled by the demonstration. How is a grocery store any different from these fairs?

It is not realistic to think that the in-store demonstrators will be as well trained as those at a fair, but providing supporting signage or displays will supplement the product interaction. Let’s use the in-store sampling of a new whole grain cracker as the example. Sampling the cracker on its own might not be very memorable nor interesting, and sampling with something might divert attention away from the cracker and highlight the topping more. The key is to have the consumers focus on the cracker but engaging them more than just feeding a hungry customer with a product that they will neither remember nor buy. Provide more information with a sign highlighting key selling points, or a display of types of grains that to drive home the point about real whole grains. Can you point out that the grains are grown in Canada? What are the benefits of that ingredient? Are there any other features of the product you want to highlight? Both the retailer and the brand win because they have provided an additional service but more importantly they have engaged the consumer in a conversation.

Not every demonstration will be a hit but by consistently providing this type of education consumers will look to the retailer as a source of information and not just the place where they buy their groceries.



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