



It's extremely important to focus on the friendliness and appearance of our employees.

Butcher's Block

By Bob Buonomano



Your Best Foot Forward

Develop an outstanding department and staff, and then relentlessly promote them both.

Increasing business in an independent supermarket can become overwhelming with the everyday task of managing today's sales.

Sometimes it seems impossible to plan beyond the next ad we're writing. Many independents fall into the trap of fighting their competition just on item price, which is exactly the battle superstores want us to fight, because it's a battle they'll win. I know that I'd have a hard time persuading my customers that I have lower prices than the Walmart supercenter down the road. I still have to be competitive, but I'd rather focus on one of my strengths, not one of *theirs*.

Perception in business can be a strong influence on a customer when she's deciding where to shop. We as independents can learn a lesson from competitors like the superstores. They know that their customers perceive them as having a low price image, and they emphasize this every day — not just in their advertising, but also in everything they do. And they're constantly building on this perception. As independents, we can use perception to our advantage to increase our sales.

A customer's perception of our operation starts within the first few minutes of the first time she walks in the door; she's already drawing conclusions and determining what she believes to be our weaknesses and strengths. This is our opportunity to point out to customers the reasons they should be shopping with us.

Independent retailers have always realized the value of running high-quality perishable departments. If so many independents run good perishable departments, what makes some stand out more than others? It's not enough to be good; we need to be outstanding. And to be outstanding, great products must be matched up with great staff.

It's extremely important to focus on the friendliness and appearance of our employees. I'm not talking about hiring "beautiful people," but friendly employees with outgoing personalities. Technical ability is an asset, but there are a lot of people with technical knowledge and

dull personalities. Imagine an employee who goes out of his or her way to talk to and help your customers, as well as having the proper technical training to do his or her job. Now that you have that one employee in mind, imagine a store full of them. Most chain stores and superstores can't compete against this.

Next is the presentation of all of these well-trained, friendly employees. There are only two words for this: appropriate uniforms. If you're selling the best-quality product available, but it doesn't look like it's being handled in a professional manner, your customers will question the product. Most retailers have confidence in the way their product is being handled, and justifiably so. But it's not good enough for just the retailer to know this; our customers must realize it as soon as they walk in our stores. And nothing speaks louder than clean, crisp uniforms and a neatly dressed staff.

Now that we have placed all of this emphasis on our employees and presentation, we have to do what our competition does, and emphasize these factors every day. Never miss an opportunity to tell your customers what your strengths are. Create something that can be identified only with your store and has value for your customers. Success is the result of consistent and persistent effort. If a retailer knows it's offering its customers a great perishable shopping experience, why wouldn't it tell its customers this in every advertisement and marketing program it does?

Put your best foot forward all of the time, and they will notice. **PGI**



2013 PGI Outstanding Independent Award winner Bob Buonomano has been cutting meat for 40 years, the past 28 as owner of Windham IGA in Willimantic, Conn. His "Help Save the Butchers" program was developed to help grocers optimize their meat departments. He can be

reached at bob@helpsavethebutchers.com.