Communicating for success

Now that the new year is upon us, those of us who make New Year’s resolutions are trying our best to turn these resolutions into realities. The same is true for your business, although you probably don’t refer to it as resolutions, more like goals, objectives or marketing plans. Whatever you call it, the intent is to profitably grow your business by selling more stuff to more people more often.

A great deal of time and consideration is given by management to develop and fine tune the New Year’s game plan, and then implement it into action at the store level. But once management completes its development and implementation phase, the strategy is then placed squarely in the hands of store-level employees to flawlessly execute the strategy 24/7. Are they ready?

Unfortunately, in most cases the frontline is viewed as the cost minimization piece of the equation. Literally millions of dollars can be spent on the development, implementation, advertising and promotional aspects of a marketing plan, but when it comes to communicating and preparing the frontline to execute the plan, little time and money is spent. Is it any wonder those marketing plans that seemed so promising on the drawing board never delivered the results you anticipated? And if the plan did deliver good results, how much better could those results have been if the frontline was fully prepared to succeed?

THE LIFEBLOOD OF ANY STRATEGY

Now, if you’re one of those managers who developed your 2005 marketing plan and then passed it off to your store managers to implement, how do you know your store managers have taken the time to sit down and explain everything to the sales associates who will face your customers everyday?

Don’t assume this is happening, as I have more than enough experience that has taught me otherwise. Some of my clients, as a backup to store managers not communicating to their employees, have boasted that they fax key information directly to the store so all employees can read what’s going on. Great idea, but a fax is no guarantee that the employees are reading it, let alone seeing it.

What’s to prevent the store manager from receiving the fax and filing it in their office, or posting it with the assumption the employees will see it and read it? Even if the employees read it, how do you know they fully understand it and more importantly, do they understand how to translate the marketing plan into actionable behaviors on the job? When it comes to frontline execution, don’t assume anything.

WHY COMMUNICATE?

So why take the time and effort to effectively communicate to your frontline? Two reasons: your frontline has the responsibilities to execute the marketing plan and secondly, their competitive nature.

Let’s take tennis and basketball as an example. Whenever you play tennis the first thing you do is volley in order to warm up. But after several minutes of volleying, then what do you do? Someone says, “Let’s play.” Same with basketball: after a few shots with your friend it inevitably ends up with: “Let’s play.” We Americans are a competitive bunch. We jump to a “let’s play” mode because it makes the activity more interesting, challenging and fun. Letting store employees know their role and how to win at executing your marketing plan gets them involved and raises their job performance to a higher level.

If you’re not keeping score, you’re only practicing. And practicing will do absolutely nothing for your bank account at the end of the day.