

Last month I gave the suppliers some idea of what their reflection probably looks like (to their customers) and what to do about it. This month I'm going to give buyers (referred to as 'you') some pointers and ideas as to what their reflection often looks like – and what to do about it.

Once again, no surprises here, to get your reflection as a buyer into shape, it all starts with preparation.

Appointment preparation

An appointment without an agreed agenda is really just a chat. The meeting has no 'direction' and so the outcome could (and usually does) end up anywhere. An agenda sent out before the appointment helps both parties prepare and minimises nasty surprises. It also ensures that the time allocated is used productively on jointly solving problems and grabbing opportunities. Your preparation ahead of the appointment must also include:

- Reviewing supplier performance to date. Also, very important for you to know what percentage of the supplier's volumes your business represents (useful in negotiations, for example).
- Any issues (service levels, claims, stock levels etc). This usually involves checking with other functions in your organisation (debtors, operations etc).
- The supplier's current activity – for example, brand support in the media.
- Review your minutes from the previous meeting to ensure that proper follow-up on agreed actions by both parties has taken place.
- Latest category insight information from your category people.
- Any upcoming activity for discussion, such as promotions and focus drives etc. Get the specific details ready for discussion – participation costs, anticipated volumes, lead-time dates, target RSPs on promo, SKU selected, WIIFT – What's In It For Them?

The appointment

What signals do you send out about you (the buyer) and your company before the meeting even starts?



on the wall

BY DAVE HENDRIE
(Part 2)

- **Reception area** – usually chaos! Untidy, a grumpy receptionist and flowers reaching the fossil stage. In one major retail chain that I used to see, the receptionist had all the buyers appointments in front of her with times, who was involved etc. I was impressed before the meeting even started! Do you personally come through to reception and collect the supplier? Do the suppliers get asked if they'd like a refreshment?
- **Your office.** If you're comfortable with your cluttered office as it is, why not hold your supplier meetings in another room (boardroom, meeting room)? As no confidential documents or samples are on display, the supplier feels relaxed and more open to your proposals.
- **The meeting.** It's fine to open with small talk if kept brief. It's even more effective if you've kept a record of some personal facts about the supplier and open by asking a question such as, "so did you and Jenny enjoy Mauritius?"

Now get into the agenda and matters at hand. Keep to the agenda items and finish on time. It's productive and common courtesy to the other suppliers waiting in reception! Conduct the interview in a relaxed but business-like manner and

ending off with a summary of the action points agreed upon.

Behavioural pointers:

- Listening intently using your ears, eyes, heart and mind is more powerful than anything else in a one-on-one interaction. When you demonstrate a conscious willingness to also understand the supplier's issues, doors begin to open and solutions emerge.
- Collaborating on common challenges – for example, how to attract consumers into your store and onto the supplier's brand. Consumers are under more and more cash pressure – surrounded with more retail shopping locations. Work together to make sure you both get more than your fair share of their spend.
- Emotion – there is no place for this in a meeting. Emotion blinds either party to alternative options, it stifles creativity in finding solutions and will be exploited by a skilled negotiator – guaranteed!
- Ego – as for emotion, you will be exploited by a skilled negotiator.
- Predictability – a watch-out! This makes it easy for the supplier to take advantage of you.
- Power is not anything like it's made out to be – it only exists in the mind so be careful of using this to the exclusion of all else. The retail landscape over the past 40 years is littered with the corpses of major organisations that at one time implicitly believed that they were all-powerful and invincible!

We need to look in our personal mirrors, fix what's ugly and get on with the business of providing shoppers and consumers with the best retail and consumption experience!



Dave Hendrie specialises in supplier / retailer sales and marketing relationship strategy at Gateways Business Consultants. His experience covers 38 years in FMCG sales, marketing and logistics at four multinationals and includes 24 years as a main board director. He is passionate about negotiation, a subject that he loves to teach equally to both suppliers and retailers. Dave Hendrie – 083-645-0088.