

Selling –In: Getting Your Product Into Retail

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Smaller companies which wish to compete in consumer goods categories need to be wiser. Unfortunately, too many fall victim to what is known as ivory tower syndrome, that is, they see their product only from their own point of view. A small or start-up manufacturer is often so enthralled with its product that the objectives of the retailer are overlooked and distribution is unsuccessful. With few exceptions, it's not enough to simply tout the virtue of the proposed product. For a small manufacturer to achieve retail product placement, the manufacturer must really understand the needs of the retailer and strive to make the retailer's job as easy as possible.

First, the manufacturer must understand that anything which reduces the retailer's risk increases the opportunities for distribution success. Therefore, it should be providing more than just a product to the retailer; it should be providing an entire "program" of profit making. This includes packaging that's been *proven* to jump off the shelf, a price that's been *proven* to meet customer expectations, and a "pull" effort (e.g., advertising, promotions) in which the ability to generate consumer awareness has been substantiated. Scientific research data gathered by independent, objective parties should be used to support the manufacturer's claims of the program's effectiveness. While research might be considered an extravagant, unnecessary expense by many small manufacturers, the cost of research becomes significantly more tolerable when one considers that it can directly contribute to sales revenue.

Second, it must be recognized that nothing breeds success like success. Placement in even one store begins a track record for use in furthering the sell-in process. A one-store sell-in may seem dismal at first. However, it can potentially offer the ammunition to move forward later. Besides, what better way to ask that someone take on risk than to show that someone else has already taken on that risk as well?

Finally, placement in even a single publication of note (and for local stores, this can mean a low cost regional publication) communicates the manufacturer is as committed to the product as it is asking the retailer. The best way in which to alleviate the concerns regarding “risk” is to demonstrate that that risk is in actuality being shared.

Making distribution happen is not an easy task. There’s a lot of competition out there. There’s the difficulty in getting retailers to meet with you and take you seriously. But mostly, there’s a perception of “risk.” Reduce that and watch new worlds emerge.