

Putting New in its Place

Balancing novelty in your sales approach

Recently I have seen an uptick in the number of new mental diseases (at least new to me) that are being discovered. In just the A's alone there is *adjustment disorder, adolescent behavior disorder, adult behavior disorder, amnesic disorder, antisocial personality disorder, avoidant personality disorder* and so on. We seem to create these in order to abdicate our personal responsibility for our own behavior, but that is a subject for another column.

The disease de jour is neophilia, which is simply described as love of the new, or more complexly described as novelty-seeking; a personality trait long associated with trouble as in attention deficit disorder, compulsive spending and gambling, alcoholism, drug abuse and criminal behavior.

Everyone seems to have this trait in varying degrees. As individuals, we differ in our reactions to novelty, because a population's survival is enhanced by some adventurers who explore for new resources, and worriers who are attuned to the risks involved (according to a John Tierney article in the Feb. 13, 2012 issue of the *New York Times*).

In fact, Kare Anderson's Harvard Business Review blog suggests your message will be more vital if it is unexpected, novel, provocative or otherwise odd, because most of your audiences are neophiliacs.

Shiny new objects

So what is the connection to distributor reps? A recognized industry expert once said "...many distributor salespeople resemble crows; they run with something new for about 10 days (half a month's route plan), before going on to the next new shiny object." If that comment is even half true, reps are buying into the idea



By Patrick T. Malone

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that to be interesting their customers, it must be new.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Your customers are interested in what is new, but only as it relates to helping them become more successful. They don't care about the latest flea control product, infusion pump or osteoarthritis pain relief product unless you can demonstrate how that will help them and their practice become more successful. Adding to the challenge, every DVM, technician, administrator, office manager, etc. has a different definition of what success looks like. The following steps will help you deliver value to your customers.

STEP 1: Take the time to understand how the decision makers and decision influencers in your clinics define success. This will define where they want to go and then your job becomes helping them get there – but it's only the first step.

STEP 2: Next, determine which three products and/or services in your extensive arsenal will best help them today. With hundreds of products at your fingertips, this can present the biggest challenge for you, and the most likely place to fall back into your neophiliac ways (i.e. I'll just



show him/her the three new things, the three new promotions, the three biggest spiff items).

Those or any combination of those could be the right three, but it could also be something that was introduced last month, last quarter or even last year that for whatever reason the timing wasn't right back then but it is now. That is step two.

STEP 3: Prioritize the three as A (best benefit for customer), B (better benefit for customer) and C (good benefit for customer). Prioritizing is important,

sitting in the car outside the clinic, or over breakfast that morning or at the end of the previous day. Steps 2, 3 and 4 are best done at the end of the previous week when you are working on the next week's work plan.

With this type of approach, you will have developed a strategy and plan that you are comfortable with, which then permits you to focus 100 percent on your execution skills. That way, you will be delivering the message that is most meaningful to that decision maker and the message that will deliver you the greatest

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because you never know how much time you will actually get. If you deliver a great benefit up front, you are likely to get additional time.

STEP 4: This is only applicable if during step 3 you discussed all three priority items. Then and only then is it appropriate to discuss the new products, promotions or specials that didn't make the top priority list. This way you are presenting what is important to the customer, but also keeping them up to date on the latest and greatest.

Steps 2, 3 and 4 are never done while walking up to the clinic, or while

return on your investment of time, talent and treasure.

If manufacturer reps complain about this approach, simply ask them to do a better job of influencing you to include their product or promotion in your top three priorities. After all, their job is to support and influence you, while your job is to influence your customers.

But don't take my word for it. Try it for yourself. Give it a month as it takes 21 days of reinforcement to create a new habit. If you're still struggling, the next meeting of Neophiliacs Anonymous is just around the corner. I'm confident you will find that this four-step process works. ■