

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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Add-Ons Can Add Up

What is the single most powerful question that has ever been created in the American economy?

Here's a hint: you've all been asked this question, and you've all answered yes at least once.

Asking great questions is a powerful tool in growing your business. Many companies are also discovering that having more of their people asking the right questions at the right times are paying off in additional sales.

Jewel/Osco and Albertson's started their Xtreme Value program in March of 2005. Each cashier has a supply of a featured item for sale at the register. Customers are offered this new or popular product, deeply discounted for quick sale, and each cashier must ask every customer if they'd like the Xtreme Value of the Day.

Sonja Vucsko, a Jewel store manager and regional coordinator for the Xtreme Value program, says it has been very successful for the company.

"Our cashiers have been very receptive to the program. It hasn't been difficult for us to train our people," says Vucsko. "We've found that the key is to suggest the items positively."

She declines to say just how much volume a typical store will do in Xtreme Values each week, but she did say that certain items move much better than others.

"We've found that the 10 for \$10.00 price point works very well, especially the sport beverages during the summer. We try to choose items that coincide with the seasons, like Valentine's Day chocolates in February, and bags of candy for Halloween."

A Jewel cashier recently told me that one of the most successful items they've offered was a Fuji disposable camera during the Thanksgiving holiday season. (Good thinking!)

The Xtreme Value program is convenient for the customer, it's an easy decision, and even though many say no, a good percentage are saying yes. What Jewel/Osco has discovered is that if you train everyone to be in sales, everyone can and will sell.

Waiters and waitresses do it all the time, suggesting a cocktail before dinner or desserts after a meal. Clothing associates are trained to match shirts, neckties and accessories to new suits, hoping to add more items to your total purchase. Amazon.com even does it electronically, suggesting similar titles to those you're about to purchase based on your profile and purchase history.

So what and when could your people “sell” in addition to what they do today in your business? Are there add-ons that could be suggested by your front-line staff, either in person or on the phone?

Think of things that customers might naturally need with the item they’re buying. If it’s a new furnace, the customer will need a supply of furnace filters. A new laser printer needs paper and ink cartridges. A yearly pet checkup by a veterinarian could be a good time to suggest purchases of pet vitamins or supplements.

What could you or your staff suggest to your current customers as they are readying to leave?

Prepare a few scripted responses to the most popular items you sell, and use the scripts yourself in customer contact situation. Change or alter the words you’re using until you find the right combination that works reasonably well. Then train the words to use to your staff.

According to sales and service expert Jeffrey Gitomer, McDonald's created the most powerful question in the history of the American economy. That question was, "Do you want fries with that?" That single add-on question has sold billions of dollars in French fries, all by the person behind the counter who merely suggested that the consumer consider an additional purchase.

But be careful. Recently Best Buy has come under fire for their tactics in selling magazine subscriptions to customers as an add-on as part of their credit card transactions.

Here's how it works: Cashiers ask each customer that pays by credit card if they'd like to receive 12 free issues of Sports Illustrated or another popular magazine. All they need to do is sign the additional bottom portion of the receipt, which is automatically printed out along with their regular credit card receipt

Many people signed the bottom without reading the fine print, which says that if you don't cancel the "free" subscription after the trial period is over, you automatically agree to becoming a multi-month paid subscriber, which is charged to the credit card you already authorized back at Best Buy.

Choose your tactics wisely. And when you do an add-on, make sure the question is easy for your people to ask, and it’s an easy decision for the customer to make.

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