

Perfumer Support of Sales

"Who's more important to the customer—the salesperson or the perfumer?" was just the first subject brought up during the Q&A-style session on Perfumer Support of Sales moderated by Larry Janosky (far right), Senior Perfumer with Felton International. The panelists were (from left) Felix Buccellato, President/Perfumer, Custom Essence; Thomas DiGiacomo, Senior Perfumer & Creative Director of Cosmetics & Toiletries, Naarden International; and Howard Kennedy, Perfumer/Manager, Fragrance Development, Coty.

The consensus of the attendees was that what is most important to the customer is that a successful product be sold to the consumer. Both the person who creates that product and the person who sells it to the customer are equally important. Throughout the session the familiar words "teamwork" and "communication" were used when discussion centered around the "how" of getting that successful product.

Communication in this context referred to the smooth working relationship among all of the departments that work together to come up with a successful product, both at the supplier and customer level. At Richardson-Vicks, the perfumer is part of the marketing team. At Avon, sales, marketing, evaluation, and technical department representatives from both the supplier and Avon are included at the presentation of the profile so all questions are answered at that point.

"Should the perfumer go on calls to the customer with the salesperson?" Communication in this context referred to the customer, salesperson, and perfumer being able to use the same words to mean the same things. Unfortunately this is not usually the case now.

This question also brought up the issue of whether or not the perfumer can take criticism. Several customer concerns were mentioned:

(1) It is difficult for the customer to be frank in critiquing a fragrance when the perfumer who created the fragrance is present. Perhaps it would be better for the perfumer to become involved only after the fragrance has been selected to make any final modifications that are required.

(2) A perfumer with expertise sometimes does not respect the critique of a customer because it comes from a non-expert. Therefore the perfumer does not respond well during a face-to-face meeting with a customer that involves a fragrance critique.

(3) If a salesperson or perfumer disagrees with a customer's critique of the fragrance submitted, they should say so. Their expertise is what the customer is interested in and can benefit from in coming up with a successful product that meets a fragrance brief or profile.

Perfumers responded to these concerns and expressed some of their own:

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(1) While it is difficult for the perfumer to hear criticism of her/his creation, it is a necessary part of the job. Perfumers must have a thick skin. A perfumer gets regular feedback on fragrances from within the company which requires taking criticism.

(2) There is a myth that the perfumer is a prima donna. Maybe the concern a customer has about critiquing a perfumer face-to-face could be alleviated by the perfumer making calls with the salesperson and therefore the customer knows the perfumer. Knowing each other means that mutual respect is more likely.

(3) Another solution to the perfumer sensitivity problem is to have a perfumer who has not created the fragrance at the call. This person would be able to clarify language differences and communicate these back to the creating perfumer.

Two other areas the customers in the audience discussed were: (1) The perfumer should know the customer account as well as the salesperson. Also, the perfumer must know the marketplace and not focus only on the customer. (2) Sometimes a customer would like to see 1 of 4 submissions that is an avant garde fragrance, one that is totally different and unique. This appeared to be a vicious circle problem: Avant garde fragrances are not often selected by fragrance evaluators and if they are submitted to the customer, the customer is not likely to do anything with it. Even if they test it it generally will not test well against other more middle-of-the-road submissions. On the other hand, if one is never submitted it will never be tested and never win a test.

Perfumers themselves debated the constraints of customer profiles: Because the profile is preset, a perfumer can't be totally creative. The feedback from a customer, too, can come across to the perfumer as if their creativity is being directed. On the other hand, a perfumer can still be creative even working with an image or feel of a familiar or already existing fragrance.

If *Perfumer Support of Sales* is covered at a future Congress, a salesperson should be on the panel. Later discussion also pointed out that an odor evaluator would add to the discussion.

To this observer, the session appeared to be a much appreciated direct dialogue between customer perfumers and supplier perfumers which apparently doesn't happen very often.

The attendees at this session were very pleased with the open, frank discussion that resulted from the format of questions and answers. There was a great deal of participation from the audience.

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