

Increase sales without asking for an order

BY PHIL SASSO

Doritos. That's all I could think when I saw the Frito-Lay truck pull up to the gas station next to me. My mouth began to water. I'm a sales and marketing guy (and a recovering junk food junkie), so he drew my attention.

I put my credit card in the gas pump and tried to take my mind off it, but I couldn't help watching him through the store window. He was in and out while I was still pumping gas. I resisted the urge to run in and buy a bag of chips (pulling a fresh one from the back of the rack). To distract myself, I thought about the sales he was making without needing to say a word. I've heard some snack food Route Sales Representatives sell more than \$1 million in product a year. \$1 million. That's a lot of corn chips!

A route sales job like this is enviable. One advantage: He's selling consumables. So when he goes back next week, he's assured of an order because some of what he delivered was, well, consumed. Another advantage: He doesn't have to ask for a sale. It's more about taking sales than talking sales. Once he closes the initial deal, he doesn't need to spend much time pushing product, most of it can be spent fulfilling orders.

You can add the same kind of on-going sales machine to your business — without stocking savory snacks.

Consumed with consumables

In the December 2009 issue of *Professional Distributor*, I wrote about selling consumables. I said you can get a lot more sales by thinking outside the toolbox and pushing a few more consumables like gloves, hand cleaner and chemicals. Tools are the backbone of the business, but consumables can provide a solid revenue stream. I thought I covered the topic fairly well, but I feel compelled to revisit it.

That's because I think there's a whole angle of consumables that I missed — and in this crazy "new economy," you need every angle you can get as a Mobile. The new angle is selling a series of consumable kits I'll call "replenishables." What distinguishes replenishables is that, unlike most other consumables, you don't usually need to ask for an order ... it's just assumed you're going to fill inventory.

Replenishable kits — like fuel line, brake line and brake bleeder repair kits — are part tool, part manufacturing plant. If a tech is doing a brake job and notices a kinked or cracked line, traditionally he has to stop and order a new line. But rather than ordering a line and holding up his bay waiting for the parts guy, the smart tech can make a replacement line in his bay in about five minutes at a fraction of the cost of buying the OEM or aftermarket version.

So these kits aren't really a cost to the shop, they're a money-maker. I don't know any shops that charge customers for the rags or penetrating oil used on a job. But they do



charge for parts. Most replenishable kits have a tool or two and a replenishable inventory of component parts.

Getting more pie

Let's face it, it's getting hard out there. A lot of customers are buying less. And you're facing stiffer competition from competing mobiles and online stores. So, these replenishable kits are a smart idea for another reason: You're rarely competing against another mobile for the sale, you're competing against the parts store. Instead of fighting over the shrinking mobile pie, these replenishable kits allow you to go after a piece of the parts store pie. (Why is writing this column making me hungry?) It lets you serve your customers by providing an inexpensive, time-saving alternative to the standard parts.

"Oftentimes, installers do not fully understand how easy it is to use our kits," said Joe Wathey, president of S.U.R.&R., a manufacturer of brake, fuel and A/C kits. "Once they see how simple it is to fabricate a line, they recognize the value of being able to repair or replace any line in minutes versus having to order and wait for an OE replacement part."

Consumable kits are normally purchased by shop owners or managers. This is a key point: By selling and stocking kits, mobiles can build relationships over time with shop decision makers. Obviously this can turn into more, and bigger (shop equipment), business. As a bonus, many shop owners pay in full and don't ask for terms like techs do. This means better cashflow.

Wathey knows what it's like in the mobile trenches. The former Cornwell dealer understands how selling consumables can benefit everyone involved: the shop can improve profitability, the installer reduces labor time, and the mobile jobber gets repeat orders while enhancing their value to their customers.

"I wish I had something like this when I was on the truck," he said.

"Mobile jobbers are used to selling tools, not consumables, although that's changing in today's marketplace," said Howard Gering of M. Eagles Tool Warehouse. "We've never ventured into consumables until recently ... it was a smart choice."

The route to success

S.U.R.&R.'s Wathey said the potential market for brake and fuel line kits is 70 percent of the shops you call on every day as a mobile.

"I sell about \$30 to \$60 in brake and fuel line inventory a shop every couple weeks," said New Jersey-based independent distributor Nick Morello. Multiply that by the two or three dozen shops that have his replenishable kits and it can become serious money.

"The great thing about the kits is the part numbers are right in the kit," said Morello, a 25-year mobile veteran. "I just jot down the part numbers, place the order and deliver the stuff the next week. It's just that easy."

Some distributors stock these components so they

can replenish inventory immediately, without the extra step of ordering and waiting. Walking in with your master kit and walking out with a sale sounds like pretty easy money. And the shop is less likely to run out of inventory while waiting for your order to come in, which makes you a hero.

The initial sale will take you the longest to make when selling a kit like this. It's a new way of thinking. Changing someone's thinking can take a little persuasion — or perhaps a bold move like a guarantee.

"I tell them if they don't like it, they can give it back," said Morello. "No one's ever given one back."

You might need to ask the shop owner or manager for the sale a couple of times to get the first order. But once you get a replenishable kit in a shop, the hard work is done. You just need to keep the kit stocked and remind the techs to use it.

Once a shop carries one replenishable kit from you, it's easier to sell them on carrying another after they see how profitable and painless it is. And you get the ongoing revenue stream. So, next time you see a bag of chips in a convenience store, think about the money you could be making selling replenishables. ■

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