

Line Review Survival Tips

10

New Rules
For Successful
Line Reviews

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Another product line review? So soon?

If your company's channel marketing strategy involves big box retailers, it seems that there is nearly always a product line review on the dashboard. In our research and creative support work for companies that have been participating in these annual (or more frequent) "trips to the shark tank," we're seeing a few things about the process that have been changing the past couple of years.

Among those changes:

I Meetings aren't always in a conference room.

Instead of presenting in a meeting room and using your prepared PowerPoint material to tell the story, you may be asked to present your product line in the planogram room where there are no projectors. Many buyers are preferring to meet "in the aisle" as a reality check on how well your products are merchandised and "speak for themselves."

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2 Related to Rule 1, you may still need a PowerPoint presentation, but it will be sent in advance of the meeting.

More and more, merchants are asking for everyone's presentation decks before the meeting. That gives them time to get an advance feel for what you are proposing, allowing the meeting to focus on other specific questions. Of course, you may choose to send only an overview presentation, saving some of your thunder for the meeting itself.

3 The agenda isn't always the real agenda.

Very important: Do you know the real motivation for the line review? For example, is the buyer merely putting pressure on the incumbent to drop prices? Is there a plan to introduce private label products? Knowing this may suggest that you focus your presentation on new products that are different, on research that demonstrates your brand's strength, or on other matters such as packaging changes that will make your products easier to shop than the competition.

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4 Pricing isn't usually set in the first round.

Pricing and margin spreadsheets are among the materials requested in advance of the meeting. Those spreadsheets are often only a starting point for further discussion and analysis. Over the course of the PLR process, there are often many looks at pricing. How well your proposal fares may be determined by many factors, especially how well your value proposition and brand positioning stand up to scrutiny.

5 Research is becoming critical to validating brand value.

The category leaders are utilizing research in their presentations to underscore why they deserve shelf space. And while the buyers tend to discount the findings, having some facts at hand is better than no facts at hand. Research is also being used by companies to identify holes in the leaders' offerings.

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6 Online traffic and sales history are critical factors.

All the online pre-shopping and price checking that takes place before shoppers come into the stores is providing merchants with valuable insights about your products. The more you can do to enhance your online content, build traffic and garner positive reviews on the retailer's website, the better off you'll be at review time. For many of our clients' presentations, we prepare website page designs and demos for use in the meeting, suggesting how the retailer's website might be improved with special landing pages, educational videos and other content to drive interest.

7 Brands are being summarily dismissed on POP signage.

Under the new rules, only store brands get top billing in point-of-purchase materials. Signage, if used at all, is intended to lend a sense of continuity to the departments. It's all about making the shopping experience better. And even though you may believe your brand deserves to be called out for shoppers, the merchants are apparently not "buying it" that brands matter more than basic selection guidance. To counter that lack of exposure, you may wish to review your packaging to be sure that it identifies your brand consistently and boldly. If you have one or more packages that are larger than others, take advantage of that extra billboard space to feature your brand and serve as an anchor in the planogram.

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8 There is increasing pressure to make packaging consistent across brands.

Related to the above trend of de-branding all POP signage, there is a corollary movement to create more consistency in packaging. Moving toward an environment where every brand shows product sizes and other selection criteria in a similar way and even with same color coding in some instances, the larger retailers and their visual standards committees seem to be herding everyone into a generic tunnel. Same as mentioned in number 7 above, don't be too quick to yield to those pressures. Dig in your heels and note that your company has strict guidelines related to logo size and color. You may find that you'll be able to win at least some of those battles.

9 Product innovation matters more than ever.

One way to differentiate your brand is to bring new products to the table. That is one thing the buyers seem to respect at line reviews, though they also don't want to do all of the heavy lifting in introducing your product. There are a few keys to getting the most cooperation for a successful product launch: getting it on the retailer's promotional schedule, offering limited time exclusivity, and working on special positioning in the stores.

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10 Regional assortments are pivotal to winning business.

The retailer expects you to be the expert on your category, including about matters of regionality. Bringing a sound strategy for localized or at least regional assortments will not only help your line enhance its financial performance. Providing this information also gives the buyer something to report that is of increasing interest to senior management

These are just a few of the new trends we've noted as Product Line Review presentations have been evolving. If you have a PLR opportunity coming up, please give us a call at 815-847-7538 or email LisaNielsen@Heinzeroth.com to talk about ways we might help you freshen your presentation with compelling research, a refresh of your packaging, promotional end caps, and other ideas to strengthen the partnership with your customer.

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