

## CONNECTING WITH YOUR TOUGHEST CUSTOMER: THE COUNTER REP

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We frequently hear the question from clients and prospects that go to market via a 2-step or even a 3-step distribution model:

“How can I effectively reach the ‘person behind the counter’ – the person most likely to impact customer purchases at the point of sale?”



### Behavioral economics gets results.

The field of behavioral economics is filled with insights for those who develop channel promotions, but a key concept to remember is the idea that when it comes to emotion-driven humans, losses loom larger than gains. In other words, counter reps don't want to miss out on an opportunity.

This feeling can be a powerful motivator, so get creative with your program design, engagement strategy and awards.

The key is to get people talking, starting with your field sales team. The more buzz you can generate, the more mindshare your promotion (and your products) will receive. And that translates into results.

These same clients/prospects then go on to lament the challenges often faced in targeting these counter associates:

- ✓ Field sales reps that do not have strong relationships with channel partners and therefore cannot effectively “sell in” incentive and similar programs.
- ✓ Principals/Owners who act as gatekeepers.
- ✓ Principals/Owners who are open to incentives, but refuse to allow the incentive sponsor direct access to counter reps, saying, “You reward me and I'll reward my people as I see fit.”
- ✓ High turnover among counter personnel.
- ✓ Counter personnel with limited Internet and/or email access.
- ✓ Long-standing competitive partnerships in place that tend to drive mindshare around competitive offerings.

While there are no easy, stock answers on how to break through to counter associates, here are a few tactics that may help:

- ✓ Identify one or two true channel “partners” who will agree to grant access to their counter people for a limited-time program (pilot); metrics tied to a successful pilot can open doors for expanded initiatives in the future, with both the pilot partners and others.
- ✓ Make things easy for principals/owners by providing a “toolkit” with elements they can easily share with counter personnel. Printed materials, promotional items (e.g., pens, note pads, counter mats) and a kickoff presentation with talking points are just a few items that may be appropriate.
- ✓ Allow principals/owners to earn, tying their earnings directly to the earnings (performance) of their counter reps; a simple override is just one example of how principals/owners could be rewarded.

- ✔ Offer rewards to field sales reps for signing up channel partners. Take it a step further by having field sales reps capture counter rep information (e.g., name, address, email address). Maintain field sales rep engagement by allowing them to earn rewards beyond the sign-up period.
- ✔ Communicate. Communicate! Communicate!! Armed with counter rep information, it's time to leverage that information with communication "touch points," including both electronic and print elements. A communications calendar, tied to the incentive period, is an invaluable, proactive tool to ensure you have the appropriate communication elements in place to motivate your audience and drive performance over time.
- ✔ Make it a Game: Best practices from the world of video gaming are gaining popularity among marketers and incentive designers. Game mechanics can give you an edge when trying to cut through the clutter with counter reps. Use tactics like frequent measures and feedback, long- and short-term goals, and rewards for both activities and achievements to gain and keep attention. Technology is driving many of these game scenarios – but you can still engage reps with traditional promo kits and scratch-off cards.

The strategies you use may differ, depending on the industry, type of rep and age of the rep you are trying to reach. Many don't have time or the desire to go online for your contest. But many sponsors are finding that text-to-win and video-based promotions are highly engaging. The most effective promotions use a mix of tactics to reach the widest audience.

When your promotion is complete, it's important to measure the results to determine your return on investment and track learning and improvements for the next time. The easiest follow-up you can do is to gather anecdotal feedback from a variety of participants, both high and low performers. Your field sales team can also explore how specific dealers and distributors supported and benefited from your promotion. But the best justification for your program's expense is to track activity on an ongoing basis and watch for spikes that coincide with your communications materials, training plans, progress reports and rewards. Together, these four areas are the key drivers of results.

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