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most often and also  
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**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The first and perhaps the most important source of acquiring product knowledge is the personal experience of the salesman. As the salesman becomes more and more familiar with his work, he becomes increasingly aware with the possible questions that buyers raise most often and also the convincing answers for the same. In other words, experience of handling customer queries makes the salesman competent in providing convincing answers. Besides, the salesman can gather a lot of information about a particular product by using it personally. Sometimes, he can convince the buyers by stating that he himself is a satisfied user of the product. b.

Libraries: Product information can also be gathered by going through some related books in libraries. In recent years, there are many business and trade journals who conduct consumer surveys at regular intervals. Such surveys cover different aspects of consumer behaviour and provide valuable information. Library information, though valuable, unfortunately is much neglected in India. c. Trade journals: Every trade or industry publishes its own journal at regular intervals. These journals usually provide detailed information about new products, improvements of old products, new innovations, etc.

The salesman has to go through these journals in order to gather knowledge of the product category. He can also gather information about innovations and new products from these trade journals. d. Senior and fellow salesmen: A great deal of product knowledge can be acquired by consulting the employer, senior salesmen and fellow salesmen. Regular discussion with them provides valuable product knowledge for the salesman.

During probation period and training sessions, senior salesmen and sales manager provide all information about the products to the juniors.

Sometimes, wholesalers, retailers and even friendly customers provide important product information to the salesman. Thus, colleagues, customers, suppliers, retailers and wholesalers are a rich source of product knowledge for the salesman. e.

Manufacturers' literature and assistance: Now-a-days, manufacturers and dealers also try to assist the salesman in acquiring product knowledge through a number of means. Followings are some of the important ones. i.

Sales manuals: Sales manuals are generally published by the manufacturers for the purpose of reference by the sales force.

They contain information about the products, the procedure to be followed in selling the products, selling reports, credit facilities, discounts, delivery facilities, etc. These sales manuals supply valuable information about the products and their selling points. It has been rightly termed as 'Salesman's Bible' as they contain exhaustive product information which becomes a valuable and readymade source of product knowledge for the sales force. ii.

Sales bulletins: In order to provide additional and up-to-date information about the products, sales bulletins are published by the manufacturers. Such sales bulletins are published at regular intervals to provide supplementary information over and above those provided in the sales manual.

These bulletins contain additional and up-to-date information regarding the products, its selling points, its improvements and additions, changes in market policy, etc. Sales bulletins are sometimes referred to as 'salesman's

newspaper' also. iii. Salesman's portfolio While sales bulletins and sales manuals are meant exclusively for the company's sales force, salesman's portfolio (also known as the sales portfolio) are usually handed over to the dealers. Sales portfolio are usually prepared in a book form containing instructions and devices regarding the method of display, advertising materials, testimonial letters, etc. for the benefit of the retailers.

Actual photographs of window display and advertising materials drafted exclusively for the retailers are also given in a sales portfolio. These salesman's portfolios are helpful to the salesman as it enables him to know more about the selling points of the products. iv.

Visit to factories: Most often manufacturers arrange the visit of the sales force to the factories to gain first-hand product knowledge. Such visit to the factories enables the salesman to obtain a great deal of information about the products. Through such visit, the salesman comes to know in detail about the manufacturing process, raw material used, standard of quality control, packing, etc in details. Salesmen living at distant places often visit showrooms of either the manufacturer or the wholesaler to acquire detailed product knowledge. Similarly, visit to the trade exhibitions and industrial fairs provide the salesman information about various products, more specifically, competitive products, substitute products, product varieties, etc. which ultimately enhances the product knowledge. v.

Meetings and conferences: Manufacturers arrange meetings and conferences of the salesmen at regular intervals. These periodic meetings and conferences also help the sales force in enhancing their product knowledge

through interactions, discussions, and deliberations. In such meetings and conferences, senior salesmen and sales officers deliver lectures and demonstrate important features of the products. This considerably increases the overall knowledge of the salesman regarding the firm and its products. Similarly, the prevalent selling problems and possible solutions are also discussed in such meetings and conferences which enhance the product knowledge of the salesmen. vi. Motion pictures and visual aids, etc. Some manufacturers use motion pictures, video clippings and slides to educate their salesmen about the product features, uses and benefits etc.

Though this method is comparatively expensive, it is quite useful for the salesman to know the salient features and various uses of the product. Sometimes, when new products are introduced this method is used to provide product knowledge. vii. Education and training: In order to improve the selling skills of the existing sales force the manufacturer often arranges education and training programmes. Such orientation programmes are usually conducted by experienced professional people who equip the sales people with new techniques and methods to improve their sales performance. Salesmen are also offered correspondence courses to update their product and organisational knowledge as well as selling skills. Thus, education and training are important sources for the salesman to acquire detailed product knowledge. viii.

Questionnaire system: Often manufacturers attempt to brush up and test the product knowledge of their sales force. They prepare a questionnaire about the various aspects of their products and the salesmen, are required to

answer these questions. The best answer giving salesman is given a prize and such events are provided wide publicity.

In order to prove their efficiency and competency for such occasions, the salesmen keep their product knowledge up-to-date. ix. Travelling demonstrators: Some manufacturers appoint demonstrators to assist the salesmen in their demonstration. These companies appointed demonstrators visit branches and showrooms at regular intervals for guiding and assisting the salesmen in effective demonstration and impressive presentation to the consumers. These travelling demonstrations undertaken by professional people considerably enhance the selling skills and product knowledge of the salesman. In addition to the above mentioned sources of product knowledge, a few other sources like keeping in contact with old and satisfied consumers, consulting with retired salesmen, etc. are also useful in getting product knowledge.

However, it all depends-upon the salesman's zeal and initiative. Further it is up to the salesman to use all or some of these sources. Only by having most of the product information at his disposal, the salesman is able to sell efficiently. Unless and until the salesman possesses clear cut product knowledge, he cannot convince and satisfy the consumers. Product knowledge also enables him to grasp several selling points of the products he intends to sell.

It has been rightly pointed out that without product knowledge a salesman is just like a wanderer who does not know his destination.