

EDITORIAL

NAMM, MTV And The Value Of Foot Soldiers

Procter & Gamble is generally regarded as the world's savviest consumer marketing firm. The maker of Crest toothpaste, Ivory soap, and scores of other well known brands pioneered modern advertising, all but invented market research, and probably knows more about how to influence consumer buying habits than any other enterprise on the planet. So, it comes somewhat as a surprise that in a recent speech, Procter & Gamble's chairman attributes much of the company's global success to its team of 5,000 crack field salesmen. These aren't the guys who draft witty slogans, pore over demographic research, or design irresistible packaging; these are the ones who visit stores and deal with prosaic tasks like making sure displays are well stocked, supermarket operators are involved in company promos, Procter & Gamble is getting its fair share of shelf space, and hundreds of other gritty tasks. In other words, they are the company's foot soldiers...easily overlooked but an essential component to success.

This discussion of the importance of execution in the field has tremendous bearing on NAMM's recently unveiled promotional program with MTV. For those who missed it, NAMM and the Music Television Network (MTV) will be running joint promotions in the coming year designed to stimulate music products sales. The first of these efforts is the "MTV Beach House Band Search," a band contest with \$10,000 in prizes, not to mention considerable exposure on television. The contest will run between July 1 through July 25, but advance publicity will begin almost immediately. MTV will run regular spots announcing the contest and urging interest parties to go to their local music store to pick up an order form.

MTV will no doubt craft some catchy, appealing, and effective spot announcing the Beach House Band Search. They should also be able to get the message out to the right demographic segment, by airing the spots over the network. But, ultimately, the success or failure of the effort rests on the

shoulders of the local merchants. The industry's foot soldiers. If, as anticipated, the MTV promo delivers a steady stream of traffic to local stores, and the local stores fail to make use of the MTV/NAMM supplied point-of-purchase materials, then the entire exercise will be a complete waste of time. The message here is pretty straightforward. NAMM is doing something that could be beneficial for the industry at large however, unless local merchants participate, many of whom continually lament the lack of national industry promotion, the effort will flop.

In the past, we have criticized most industry promotion efforts because they were either impractical, unaffordable, self-serving to a few parties, or some combination of all three. The industry can't afford network television; collective retail promotions rarely work because competitive retailers are reluctant to join forces and risk blurring their identity within their market; and manufacturers usually dislike their competitors with such intensity that they can't resist trying to trip up the other guy.

In this NAMM/MTV promotion, the industry finally has something with the potential to work. It's affordable: MTV will provide the air time gratis. Retailers can participate with or without their competitors. And, since manufacturers aren't running things, there is less chance for backbiting. Is this going to immediately ratchet industry sales up to a new level? We have no idea. However, it costs so little to participate that dealers would be crazy to pass up the opportunity. Contact NAMM at 1-800-767-NAMM to find out how you can get involved. Become a good foot soldier for a worthy cause.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor