



By Anthony Raissen

Ready, Set, Go: Retail Here We Come!

Congratulations, you have arrived at the milestone in your company's history when you are finally ready to sell your product at retail.

You've been down the roads of anxiety, peril, product development, package development, testing numerous creative executions and experimenting with multiple media vehicles. Now it's finally time to see what happens when the proverbial "rubber meets the road."

This road, when approached with the same degree of cautious optimism with which you started your DR campaign, can be the most lucrative and exciting road you will ever travel. It is now that you are able to reap the fruits of your labor. This is when you get to place your product at the fingertips of the millions of consumers who saw your product on television, heard your ads on the radio and Googled you time and time again — but never bought your product. In addition, your existing customers will now be able to have immediate access to your products.

Why, then, will they buy your product now at retail? This is the question you will be faced with in meetings with countless retailers. This is the question that can haunt you if you do not have the correct answer. The unfortunate part is, there is no one correct answer. Rather, there are many answers which — when given at the right time, in the right venue — come together and answer the question.

So the questions you should be asking right now are: when is the right time, and where is the right venue? In my experience, the right time is usually when the retailer

is reviewing its Planogram, and the right venue is usually at a trade show that coincides with the retailer's Planogram review timetable.

This is a time consuming and labor-intensive exercise

for retailers, and they tend to be firm with their timetables. In some cases, the review can be as long as one year in advance of the actual Planogram reset. For example, July is when the sun care category is typically reviewed. So don't expect to get a favorable response from a retailer if you try selling in your new suntan lotion in November.

Many manufacturers and retailers today participate in trade shows run by Efficient Collaborative Retail Marketing (ECRM). ECRM runs shows throughout the

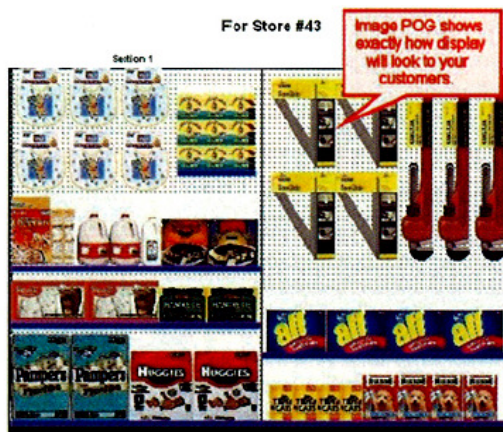
year focusing on specific categories and Planogram review schedules. ECRM schedules meetings with retailers on behalf of each manufacturer every 20 minutes. Suppliers see almost all buyers in their category — typically more than 40 chains at each show.

The cost of doing business at retail can become very expensive. Selling to a national chain with thousands of stores definitely opens your product up to a large audience with a big voice, but it comes at a price. Companies taking a more cautious and phased approach to going into retail have built

many successful brands. Regional chains can provide a springboard for manufacturers to learn the retail process.

Don't regional chains look for the same attributes that a national chain looks for? Sure they do, however, it may be more affordable for you to provide regional advertising and in-store support than to provide the same support on a national level.

Don't be fooled by your direct response success. You will need to advertise and implement a strategic marketing plan specifically to ensure success at retail. Plan on line extensions, new product introductions and, most of all, be proactive. Don't wait until you have a "problem" at retail — keep your eye on the ball and track your retail sales to ensure that you are meeting or exceeding the retailer's expectations. ■



A "Planogram," as seen above from Shelf Logic®, refers to the combined chart and calendar that a retailer uses to add or delete items from a particular category in its stores.

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