

NEWS

MARSH INCREASES IN-STORE SAMPLING

LONG BEACH, Calif. -- Marsh Supermarkets, Indianapolis, plans to increase in-store sampling activity this year based on positive feedback from sampling during 2004, Roy Fossum, senior vice president, merchandising, told the ninth annual Elite Team Conference here sponsored by Mass Connections. Fossum said sampling programs at Marsh were up 50% last year, "and we will double that increase this year."The

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The goal is to have five events per weekend at larger stores, four events at average-sized stores and three events at smaller stores, he said.

The results of the sampling program have been very positive, Fossum said, and included the following:

- **68% of Marsh consumers said the sampling persuaded them to make a purchase.**
- **85% said they preferred in-store events to promotions in newspapers or on television.**
- **83% said the events improved their shopping experience.**

- 75% said the sampling events helped them locate a particular product in the stores, "which was especially helpful during the first three or four months at our lifestyle store," he noted, which has a totally different kind of layout.

Marsh concentrated on sampling several of its Signature lines, which include whole bean coffee, deli meats, cinnamon rolls, Indiana pork and premium Angus beef, with sales increasing anywhere from 600% to 2,000%, Fossum said.

It began the sampling program about a year ago "to serve customers, promote our brand message and bring excitement to the store," Fossum explained. "We felt it was a great way to differentiate ourselves and to connect directly with customers."

Working with Mass Connections, "we developed a clear strategy to create enjoyable, entertaining events," he pointed out, including putting uniforms on in-store demonstrators and cloths on sampling tables.

Addressing consumer packaged goods companies in the audience, Fossum said, "If you can find retailers who make this part of their strategy, it's a great way to spend your marketing funds."

Another speaker at the conference, Kellyanne Conway, president and chief executive officer of a research firm called the polling co., Washington, said a series of interviews with CPG managers and consumers support the positive impact of in-store sampling on sales of new items.

According to Conway, 69% of CPG companies said in-store sampling is the best way to introduce a new product, while 36% of consumers in a phone survey said they were likely to try a new product if they had a coupon for it and 28% said they would try a new product if they could sample it. "In fact, 87% of respondents said they were

more likely to buy a new item, even if it was more expensive, if they were able to sample it first," she added.

Among consumers interviewed at store level, 32% said sampling would probably make them try a new product and 74% said they were likely to purchase a more expensive item they had tried and liked than a less expensive item they didn't taste, Conway said.

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