

Training program increases gift-card sales

Cadillac Fairview wanted to turn an already great customer-service team into a crack sales force to increase sales of its shop! Card, a company-wide gift card.

More than half of gift-card sales occur in November and December, so Cadillac Fairview had launched its card (a MasterCard-backed bilingual gift card) in October 2004. In 2005, Cadillac Fairview's top competitor prepared to launch its own gift-card program, one without a fee, so Cadillac Fairview wanted to improve its own gift-card sales for the upcoming holiday season. It realized that the guest-services staff needed better training to fully promote the card.

By the end of October 2005, 175 guest-service representatives from 27 centers across Canada were trained and ready for the holiday selling season.

Implementation

After the 2004 holiday season, Cadillac Fairview analyzed its gift-card sales and found that 1.23 percent of shoppers decided not to buy a card because they didn't want to pay the accompanying \$1.50 administrative fee. Guest services employees lacked the skills needed to persuade these shoppers to buy the card despite the fee.

Cadillac Fairview also determined from a property-by-property analysis which centers were successful and which ones struggled with the launch of the card. To create a benchmark, Cadillac Fairview had arranged for a companywide mysteryshop to assess the existing level of customer service and identify areas needing improvement.

The company decided to preserve the cards' administrative fee and better train the staff to promote the card. A well-trained guest services staff would also improve customers' overall shopping experience.

Cadillac Fairview hired a consultant to develop a customized "Train the Trainer" program.



In September 2005, 30 guest services supervisors attended these sessions in Toronto, Montréal and Calgary. For ongoing on-the-job remedial training, they learned coaching and mentoring exercises to help teach their employees specific sales skills, including dealing with difficult customers.

Those 30 supervisors later trained customer-service staff in 27 properties throughout the country. During the holiday period, the supervisors monitored the staff's performance and when necessary stepped in to provide remedial training.

Weekly meetings allowed teams to discuss successes and problems. During the holiday period, Cadillac Fairview sent mystery shoppers back to each center three times to assess whether the staff had improved their sales techniques.

Results

From Oct. 10 to Oct. 31, 2005, 175 guest services staff completed the training program. After the holiday season, they were surveyed, and on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 indicating "exceeding expectations"), they rated the program a 4.8.

The post-holiday mystery-shop results compared favorably with the benchmark, most notably in the area of gift-card sales. The staff improved overall scores by 6 percent over the scores achieved during the earlier mystery shop.

In November and December 2005, shop! Card sales grew by \$5 million, a 19 percent increase over their sales during that period in 2004 — meaning Cadillac Fairview achieved a return on investment for this program of 75 percent. ■

Best in Class: The Art of Sales Training

Cadillac Fairview Corp.

Toronto

Expenses: C\$66,757.22

Professional Recognition: Fran Moore, manager, customer experience, Susan Williams, national director, marketing, Georgina Farris, presentation & Web site coordinator, Shaun Belding, president & CEO, Belding Skills Development Corp.