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Exploring Supermarkets' Need for Quality Control

'Inadequate attention can lead to loss of sales'

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By David W. Ostrow, partner, WeiserMazars LLP

One of the key factors in running a successful supermarket is establishing consistent quality control – both in terms of having a high volume of stock and in the quality of individual products as they are delivered to the store. Inadequate attention to these areas can lead to loss of sales.

According to the WeiserMazars 2015 Food and Beverage Industry Survey, both small firms (companies with less than \$50 million in annual revenue) and large firms (companies with more than \$50 million in annual revenue), identified improving operations (including quality, delivery, safety and cost) as one of their highest areas of concern in the coming year.

Produce

Produce is a particular area for attention. When supermarkets buy produce at wholesale markets, it's important that the buyer is knowledgeable and can recognize the freshest items that will also appeal to the customer. Consumers are not going to shop at a supermarket that is known for spoiled or rotten produce and visual appeal is just as important as freshness. The 2015 Food and Beverage Industry Survey found that 16 percent of small firms and 33 percent of large firms predicted that locally grown/produced foods would be responsible for increased sales in 2015. This means it's important that produce buyers are knowledgeable about the seasonal produce of their local geographic area in addition to being able to identify "fresh" products from abroad.

Buying services are used by many large supermarket chains when purchasing produce. Advantages of this service include the elimination of the need for every store to have a dedicated produce buyer and the ability to secure better prices due to the large volume of purchases. There is also the ability to return damaged or substandard produce more easily. However, the use of a buying service requires careful oversight of the produce coming into each store by the owner and/or produce manager.

Similar to produce, other areas that require careful monitoring are deli cases, sushi displays, and salad bars. It's important that these displays appear fresh and ready to eat.

The Importance of Displays

In addition to price, quality of goods and customer service, displays are an important element that requires a lot of quality control in any supermarket, because they play a key part in attracting and retaining customers.

Boxed items, canned goods and beverages must be accessible and any items with expired dates must be removed from shelves.

Bakeries, health and beauty aids, stationery, seasonal products and fresh flowers all require attention to their display. It's particularly important to make sure there are enough varieties of these items in order to attract shoppers with many different needs.

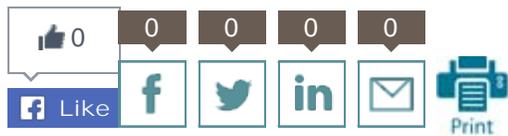
Maintaining the Right Product Mix

Employees must have a working knowledge of the supply and demands of each store. Monitoring inventory and purchases are absolutely essential. Customers are not happy to find their favorite product out of stock.

Customer loyalty is key – so the quality control of your inventory and store are very important. If customers are finding they can't rely on a store to have what they want and/or need, it's likely they will go to a competitor.

Though automation has taken over a significant degree of business oversight, it's still critical for personnel to watch the inventory. Department managers are responsible for the daily monitoring of store aisles and displays.

Effective quality control requires management and staff to work together toward the goal of a successful supermarket business. If you're not careful, improper quality control can be the cause of huge losses. Always remember to constantly and carefully track what you have in stock, make sure it's of the best possible quality, and monitor how much you're selling.



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