

STRATEGY

A featured segment designed to share business-critical information to seed-selling professionals. Visit SeedWorld.com to download this department and other tools to help you sell seed to farmers.

Back to the Basics

THE FACE OF THE SEED INDUSTRY IS EVOLVING. NOT ONLY ARE FARMERS AND THEIR NEEDS CHANGING, BUT THE INCREASED USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES IS CHANGING THE BUSINESS LANDSCAPE OF THE SEED INDUSTRY. HOWEVER, WHEN TALKING TO SEED SELLING PROFESSIONALS IN VARIOUS SECTORS ACROSS THE COUNTRY—AND THE WORLD—THEY ALL SAY THE SAME THING WHEN ASKED TO PROVIDE THEIR BEST ADVICE FOR SELLING SEED: KNOWLEDGE, PERFORMANCE DATA AND RELATIONSHIPS ARE STILL KEY.

The information you need to know about products is changing and becoming more complex, but the art of selling seed and seed products still comes back to the basics. And while you may not be selling a lot of seed during the summer months, a lot of the work garnering knowledge and improving relationships can be done from June to August.

PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

- Hold grower meetings once or twice a year to keep customers up-to-date on new varieties. This also gives you a chance to garner feedback from your

customers on their experiences with varieties, and further develop your relationships with them. This becomes even more important as more products, such as multiple trait stacks and refuge-in-bag, hit the marketplace.

- Keep in close contact with suppliers—this ensures that the best and most up-to-date information on varieties is being passed on to your customers. This also becomes more important with the introduction of new, complex products that might be the result of industry collaborations.

PERFORMANCE DATA

- There is no substitute for personal experience. Gather firsthand knowledge about varieties by conducting your own trials. Farmers have access to multiple sources of trial data, which can be overwhelming. Providing them with personal data gives them a better understanding of how the results will relate to their farms.

- The technology for collecting data has come a long way and there are now programs on the market that take the work out of data collection. Data can now be shared more easily, and graphs, charts and conclusions can be drawn up with the click of a mouse.

- Make careful notes on your variety trials and take pictures—this information will be useful the following spring.

- Encourage your customers to allow you to set up test plots in their fields. It shows them how new varieties will perform on their farms and provides you with an opportunity to discuss the results with them, so you can learn more about their needs and what they're looking for in new varieties.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- Walk the fields with customers during critical stages like emergence, when pests start to arrive, after spraying and through harvest. The success of the year's seed choice is still fresh in their minds and they may want to buy more seed or make a change to their program. This also creates an opportunity to spend one-on-one time with your customers and raise their awareness about differences in varieties.

- Focus on building relationships with those you can convince about the merits and value of your product.

- Take the time to determine what your growers need by asking lots of questions. What they need is

FOCUS ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS



not necessarily always the same as what you want them to have. And with so many new products on the marketplace it can be easy to fall into a trap of selling the same variety, when a new one might offer a better solution.

ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMERS

- Implement customer clubs or programs designed to push the yield limit—like a VIP club where you go around with the weigh wagon at the end of the year to compare yields.
- Use social media to inform farmers about upcoming promotions, new and exciting products in the seed industry and early-buy programs. This might be in the form of a printed newsletter, an e-newsletter or a blog on your website—there are lots of possibilities.
- Think of a challenge to encourage customers to try new things—suggest that growers section off an area in

USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO INFORM AND PERSUADE.

their fields to do something different with their crops. This will give them a chance to compare against normal routines.

- Invest in benefit calculators and/or phone applications—there's a lot of information out there concerning input costs and returns to the farmer. It can be difficult to factor in all the variables, but there are new technologies and phone apps that can help calculate increased yield opportunities and commodity pricing, to name two examples.

ARE YOU ABLE TO ADD VALUE?

FROM THE MOUTHS OF SEED SELLERS...

"Know your product. If you can convince your customer that you're the most knowledgeable person, he'll remember that—just being the person that he remembers the best."—Steve Kinsell, president of Silver Lane Hybrids

"The companies that are going to be successful are the ones that are able to add value—that are going to be able to take precision farming techniques, agronomic features, and benefits and solutions to growers' farms."—Tom Burrus, president of Burrus Hybrids

"Relationships are key. I'm a firm believer that you need to have excellent relations with your customer. And you have to listen to their needs and work with them, not against them."—Brent Stirling of Cropmark