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STRATEGY

Confirmation

TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT CONFIRMATION DOES FOR SEED SALES REPS, THEIR CUSTOMERS, THEIR SALES TERRITORIES AND THEIR COMPANIES. IT'S EASY TO SEE WHY THE PROCESS HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS TOWARD REACHING SALES GOALS, ESPECIALLY IN THIS NEW, HIGH-VALUED INVENTORY MARKETPLACE.

Cash or credit. You find out who will pay and who won't pay. Remember, the rule today is that no seed goes into the ground unless it's paid for or being financed.

Occludes interference from competitive, late-season programs. Last-ditch attempts by companies to salvage sales happen every year. An aggressive confirmation process will prevent most of those programs from having any effect on your business.

Nerves of steel-type confidence come only from continuous customer contact. It takes greater courage to confirm an order once it is written, than it does to write it the first time.

Familiarizes the seller with possible "haulback hotspots," which are places buyers are likely to either lose acres or areas where you suspect they've over-ordered. A couple of these uncertainties can hurt you. However, if you have done a good job confirming everywhere else in your territory, it will have much less effect.

Informs the buyer on how, when and where to plant the seed that was ordered. This instills confidence in the buyer because he/she knows how to use your products, while greatly increasing the rep's confidence that the products will be used correctly.

Reassures the customer he/she is doing the right thing. Buyers like to be reminded of why they made certain decisions. This is one of the biggest benefits of a confirmation and reselling process.

Manages the entire sales process from order to delivery. Once confirmation is complete, the entire sales process has been handled. It validates that every other part of the sales process has been managed.

Attention is something today's growers never get enough of. That's why, as much as possible, the confirmation process should be done face-to-face.

Tracks a buyer's actual usage. It allows you to measure the buyer's growth from the previous sales year.

Identifies those customers who make up next year's sales increase potential. This is the time of year to get yourself and your buyers planning for next year. Top sellers identify the next year's cream of the crop customers during the confirmation period.

Obligates the customer to buy. The answer at confirmation time is not maybe. It is a definitive yes or no. That kind of answer allows firm plans to be made for the rest of the sales season and next year's company production plans to be solidified.

Negates return of unsold seed. This is one of the primary benefits of confirmation. Excessive or out-of-balance inventories kill sales territories and companies. The key is to make sure the seed that has been sold gets planted.

YOUR LAST LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST EXCESSIVE INVENTORY

Order confirmation is one of the most misunderstood and highly neglected parts of a seed sale. Not only do reps avoid it, but many orders are written so late into the season that they don't think confirming them is even necessary. However, confirmation is essential to the success of every seed business. Properly confirmed orders allow sellers to grow their businesses year after year, without interruptions from unexpected, unfulfilled orders. Seed sales reps that ignore this aspect of the business will rapidly find their inventories becoming a liability, rather than an asset. You cannot afford to not confirm every sale prior to delivery.

Selling seed is a year-round activity, which makes confirmation a year-round activity. That's because there isn't a single day that growers don't think about the seed they plant. Seed is their livelihood and their source for cash flow. You think about your finances every day, don't you? Of course you do, and so do farmers. Talking with farmers about their seed needs is always in vogue—there is no specific time of the year to sell seed. Seed can be sold every day, all year long, which also means confirmation can occur every day, all year long.

"A SEED SALE IS NOT A SEED SALE UNTIL IT'S CONFIRMED, PAID FOR AND COVERED UP WITH DIRT".

—ROD OSTHUS

INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

Confirmation can be defined as the seller's last line of defense against excessive inventory. In fact, confirmation is the only surefire way to protect your company from the high costs associated with excessive, out-of-balance inventories that are carried over, due to unfulfilled orders. When properly executed, confirmation helps sellers discover who is, and who is not, going to keep their promise to use the products they have already pre-ordered. It sounds simple, doesn't it?

The cost of getting a seed sale today is at an all-time high. But few field sellers do an adequate job of making sure that cost is covered by ensuring the order will stick. Amid rumors of short supplies, growers continue to double and triple-book seed by ordering from several companies, which makes order confirmation all the more essential. You would think that order confirmation is the number one priority in every company, but it is not. This sloppiness costs companies sales and profits every year.

CONFIRMATION STARTS WITH "GETTING PHYSICAL"

When referring to the physical side of confirmation, this actually refers to the aspect of face-to-face contact. Some of the most grandiose haulback surprises have come from customers who were "confirmed" using the non-physical method, which counts on the notion that, "I can't get hold of him, but I know he's going to take it."

The confirmation contact you make with a grower must always result in a definitive, face-to-face, yes or no response. For example ask, "Are you going to plant the seed and (if so) which fields will each variety be planted in?" If field sellers are not getting physical with face-to-face contact with their buyers and asking those types of questions, confirmation is not taking place. In these cases, the seed sale should be canceled and the seed placed back into inventory. Confirmation is a strategy that is used to ensure the future, not the present, and it all starts with getting physical.

WHERE ON THE WEB

This column was written by Rod Osthus, publisher of the Seed Seller Training Journal. For more information and tips on selling seed, visit RCTHOMAS.COM.

CONFIRMATION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF EVERY SEED BUSINESS

