



SELLING

/ SALES SPOTLIGHT

BOOST CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

by Susan Bloom

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IT'S ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT TO BUILD AUTHENTIC, genuine connections with customers, but with so many touch points aimed at customers these days and so much information circulating in the marketplace, it can be increasingly challenging to reach them—making those outreach efforts that much more critical.

“With the increase of e-commerce and the fast pace at which our customers need material, customer engagement is more important than ever, and we have to continue to build on the relationships we have with them,” said Bayli Polk, customer engagement coordinator at Nacogdoches, Texas-based Elliott Electric Supply, who added that this process has also gotten harder than ever. “Sometimes you just have to get inventive to make sure you’re getting your customer’s attention in a way that works for them,” she said. “It’s also important to ensure that what you’re doing is adding value to their business, because no one wants their time wasted.”

“It’s simple for an electrical contractor or end-user to place an online order, but because lighting is technical, it’s the personalized service that sets us apart,” said Miranda Shepherd, vice president and general manager of Lamp Sales Unlimited in Jacksonville, Fla. “Many national distributors use e-commerce as a convenient way for their customers to place orders and do business with them, but we prefer a more personal approach. Lighting is technical, and our seasoned team of lighting consultants offer solutions tailored to the customer’s specific needs. At the same time, engaging a customer face to face can also play a crucial role in building relationships. If the customer is in a hurry and needs an answer right away, they can always call or email and get a prompt response and a spec sheet to verify that the product we’re offering them will work for their application.”

David Hoyle, vice president of operations at City Electric Supply (CES) in Mesa, Ariz., agreed. “Electrical distribution is a people-first business, and the relationships we have with our customers have always played a fundamental role in the success of

our branches; we help each other succeed, and we grow alongside them—as a team,” he said. “We’re in an industry that’s constantly changing, and it’s our job to continue to stay innovative and help our customers find solutions in a timely manner. It’s crucial because they rely on us as a partner in all of their projects.”

To provide the utmost support, “our team members establish authentic and meaningful relationships with our customers, and we also strive to make an impact in the communities we’re in through the people we serve,” Hoyle said. “In addition to building a solid foundation with our customers, our branch teams are committed to staying up to date on trends, new products, features, benefits, and applications to help build and maintain a knowledge base that they can reference. We understand the responsibility we have as an organization to give customers the best experience possible when they enter a CES branch.”

One of the ways that Lamp Sales Unlimited has increased engagement is by creating a counter area designed to make customers feel comfortable. “We personalize our customers’ experience by addressing them by name as soon as they arrive, and we make it a point to know about their families and favorite sports teams to help them feel like they’re visiting with friends,” Shepherd said. “We also have interactive merchandising displays that enable us to demonstrate products we’re offering to customers to help verify that the product will work for their application.

“We maintain an extensive customer database broken out by customer type and we send them email blasts featuring new products or promotions for a specific item at a great price as a way to get their attention,” she continued. “Sending emails to a targeted customer base helps us get more responses, which helps drive sales, and we also use LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to market our products and services to show our followers what sets us apart from our competitors.”



INDUSTRY INFO

NAED's CEP program trains all levels of sales roles via engaging videos, online modules, learning activities, and helpful job aids.

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REP ROUNDUP



■ **Pioneer Sales Group** has been named to rep ESL Vision in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and western Wisconsin.

■ **Synergy Electrical Sales** now reps Signify's

Genlyte Solutions portfolio of professional luminaires and lighting control systems. The brands include Interact; Philips Dynalite; Chloride, Day-Brite, Ledalite, and Lightolier for indoor applications; and Gardco, Hadco, Lumec, and Stonco for outdoor applications—in addition to Philips and Advance.

■ **Schaeffer Marketing Group** now reps Keystone Technologies in the St. Louis metro area and southern Illinois.

Collaborating on Customers with Manufacturers

At Elliott Electric, “a comprehensive approach to customer engagement is paramount so that we can ensure that we’re delivering a full package and including all of the different types of customers we have,” Polk said. “One recent demonstration of this was our designation of Keystone as our ‘Vendor of the Month’ this past March. This program involved more than 30 pit stops by the Keystone LIVE! on Tour mobile showroom and product showcases to our locations stretching from Georgia to Phoenix and was an opportunity for our team members to engage with Keystone colleagues, understand the company’s products and services, and ask any questions.”

According to Polk, “Coordinating this involved the combined efforts of the Elliott Electric outside sales team, Keystone’s rep agencies, and

the Keystone sales team and led to a very successful campaign.”

Among the other outstanding manufacturer partners Elliott Electric collaborates with on customer-focused outreach, “we’ve worked closely this year with suppliers like Eaton and Milwaukee to keep our customers up to date on new and innovative solutions,” Polk said. “We’ve also started working with several vendors to create a weekly offering of product and service videos on our social media platforms.”

Lamp Sales Unlimited has also appreciated the unique on-site training offered through the interactive Keystone LIVE! on Tour mobile showroom. “Each of our salespeople invites the key decision makers from their top customers to view this mobile showcase, and we’ve found it to be a great way to learn more about Keystone’s products and what sets them apart from other lighting manu-

facturers while also providing opportunities for us to meet with our customers and deliver them a valuable experience,” Shepherd said.

According to Shepherd, “We’re also an authorized distributor for Intermatic, which manufactures time switches, electrical control products, and surge protection devices, as well as GM Lighting, which specializes in tape lighting. There’s no better way to increase sales than to sell more product categories to your existing customer base, and reps from both of these companies actively train staff at our branches to keep us updated on the latest products and features and grow sales.”

In the lighting industry, CES has similarly found that manufacturers like Keystone go above and beyond by being flexible, accessible, and easy to do business with. “The local relationships, training, and participation in counter days and lunch-and-learn events that Keystone offers expands opportunities for us to provide quick solutions for our customers,” Hoyle said.

Elsewhere around the electrical products industry, “we work with Generac to create customer engagement events around their ‘Power 4 Profits’ training program,” Hoyle noted. “These types of events offer us an opportunity to work with our vendor partners to provide the hands-on experiences and continued education that enables us to better serve our customer base in various ways.” ■

ARE YOU CONCENTRATING ON YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Our experts share the following tips for enhancing customer engagement:

- **Cover the basics:** “Provide exceptional customer service, build relationships with your customers and partners, and respond to customers quickly,” Lamp Sales Unlimited’s Miranda Shepherd recommended. “Also, don’t lose your customer’s trust by overpromising and underdelivering.”
- **It takes a village:** “Strategy isn’t a solo sport,” noted Elliott Electric’s Bayli Polk. “It takes people from different aspects of the business coming together to successfully engage your customers.”
- **Align around shared values:** “We value our manufacturers, and we all have a mutual understanding and prioritize supporting the demands of our local market, which is essential,” said City Electric Supply’s David Hoyle. “The benefit and value of meeting those demands through excellent service and educational opportunities that strengthen our industry knowledge can and will continue to be felt by your customers. The market is always growing and changing, and our goal is to give our branch teams and customers the confidence to continue to grow and succeed—together.” —S.B.



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