

Pulling the Trigger on Training

ConocoPhillips implements Shop'n Chek's mystery shopping enhancement program

By Greg Lindenberg



HOUSTON -- ConocoPhillips is using mystery shopping company Shop'n Chek Inc.'s new Triggered Training, a frontline training and learning solution, at all of its approximately 8,600 Conoco, 76 and Phillips 66 retail locations to improve operational performance at the store level.

"One of the things we wanted to improve upon over last year was our mystery shop and image evaluation program in general. We hadn't really gotten a good response back from our customers with the program we had in place," Kelvin Covington, ConocoPhillips' manager of programs, told *CSP Daily News* concerning the decision to implement this program.

Through Triggered Training's real-time, immediate delivery of training content and feedback loops, Shop'n Chek clients can reduce or eliminate the time gap between the measurement of operational performance and resulting customer service improvements.

The software empowers clients to automatically deliver focused, web-based training to all store locations where customer service deficiencies are detected—enabling efficient, measurable improvements to the customer experience in a fraction of the time required by other solutions.

The system works by "triggering" immediate action at the store level based upon the results of a client's customer experience measurement programs. A client's mystery shopping, audit or customer feedback survey program information serves as the input for the Triggered Training process. Client-defined thresholds for acceptable performance are automatically monitored to detect any deviance from accepted standards. And the appropriate online, targeted training program or programs are quickly delivered to the manager of any under-performing location via automated email notifications.

"Marketers can also look at digital photographs of the overall store, or if there are any issues, there are digital pictures that go along with the [mystery shopper's evaluation]," Covington said. "Say they didn't score well on the bathroom; there's a digital picture of that to show as evidence. It also gives the marketer something to go back and look at and say 'OK, this is what I need to work on'."

Triggered Training is part of the Visual Barometer program. Shop'n Chek's professional shopper evaluates a store, and then, through Visual Barometer, actual customers are encouraged to corroborate what the professional shopper has seen. Printed on a customer's in-store or at-pump receipt is a request to visit www.gasvisit.com to fill out a short survey, which enters the respondent in a drawing to win free gasoline.

"It's great for the consumer because the consumer gets to win free gasoline, but they also give us an opportunity to get more insights on what the consumer experience is. We want more feedback on the consumer experience," said Covington.

He said that in tests, they have seen from 10 to 20 consumer "feedback points" or responses each month for a particular store. He added that when ConocoPhillips tested the system at its company-owned locations, it incentivized employees to encourage the consumers to go to the website to fill out the survey, and got 100 responses per store on average. "And our employees actually felt good about what they were doing, so we had a morale increase, because they felt like they were really engaging with the customers. That was an unexpected good consequence," Covington said.

"So if the consumer [offers] feedback that a restroom not up to par, we can send an email to the store itself—this is the 'trigger'—saying 'this is what was wrong with your restroom from a customer standpoint; these are some things you can do to improve that,'" he said.

Another example would be if there is a question about a fuel dispenser that is not properly labeled. If that turns up on the mystery shop evaluation, “we can send an email to the store saying ‘you missed this question; this is the way it should have been labeled, here is a link to the website where you can order that label for that dispenser, so they can take care of it right then. There’s no waiting for them trying to figure out what label they need, how they get it,” Covington said.

As a final example, he said, “One of the things we look at is how well the store is merchandised—if there are holes on the shelves where products are not available to the customer. If necessary, we can email information on proper merchandising techniques or category management.”

There is a three-to-five day response time for those emails to arrive from when the mystery shop has occurred, which Covington said is “a lot quicker than” their previous system, which took from a week to 10 days.

And there is also a question in the mystery shopper program concerning suggestive selling or upselling to the customer. “If that doesn’t happen, we can send Triggered Training to the store on how to increase sales by offering a service or an item to the customer,” he added.

Norcross, Ga.-based Shop’n Chek is a full-service customer experience measurement company delivering in-store information for convenience stores, gas stations, restaurants, drug stores, grocery stores, wireless providers and other retailers. It has a network of 140,000 dedicated mystery shoppers nationwide and more than 50,000 shops conducted each month.