

Kodak Focuses On Counter Personnel To Sell Advanced Photo System

by Harvey A. Phillips

The Advanced Photo System clearly represents one of the most ambitious product launches in the history of the photo industry. As is the case with any new product introduction, one of the keys to its success is the people behind the retail counter. The level of sophistication behind this "new film format" makes the retail counter people an even more important part of the APS sales mix.

Recognizing the importance of this vital retail link, Kodak is providing a sales training package of historic proportions. For Kodak and retailers the task will be to educate consumers about how to "Take pictures. Further," to quote the tag line on the company's advertising message. The Advanced Photo System is a major step in allowing consumers to do more with their pictures than ever before.

This spring when consumers begin to make their sales decisions, they will seek out those retailers who can provide the answers they need. These new camera buyers will be driven to retailers by the massive combined marketing efforts of the world's leading photo companies. While the marketing communications effort will be immense, the full story needs to be told at the retail counter.

The Advanced Photo System includes a number of individual components that together provide the advancements that picture-takers are seeking. Consumers need to understand that the cassette and the unique magnetics built into the film drives the design of the cameras. The cameras in turn allow user input combined with important scene and personalization information to be passed to the film. The film then passes this information to the photofinishing equipment. The camera, the film or the photofinishing by themselves do not create the system. It's the interaction and communication between these elements that delivers the features and benefits that consumers by the thousands have told Kodak they want.

Explaining a Complex Story

The Advanced Photo System is a complex story. Previously, retailers sold film and cameras and photofinishers sold prints and enlargements. Now with this new system the consumer, for the first time, will determine the cost of the end product. If they choose to fill their first roll with panoramic or group format prints, the photofinishing cost will reflect their choice.

The photofinishing package delivered by the new system is different. It is larger in size and it contains more value. The system envelope contains an index print and the camera user's choice of picture formats and print sizes as well as the film safely stored inside the cassette. Also, the system delivers a quality improvement provided by the IX feature and back-print personalization depending upon the camera model used.

Consumers need to know that they will no longer see the film and negatives that traditionally provided reprints. Instead, they will bring the index print and the cassette to the photofinisher or specialty store. They must be told that the print format is under their control, both at exposure and when ordering additional prints.

It's a new concept. The retailer and sales staff must be educated first so they can tell consumers what the stem delivers and how all of the interrelated elements work together.



Creating a Unique Training Program

Kodak has taken a unique product concept and devised a unique multi-level training program. Training begins with an introductory video that very quickly gives an overview of the system and Kodak Advantix cameras, films and photofinishing options. The advertorial piece addresses the needs of personnel who do not have extensive technical

background. It is designed to be fast paced and allows some retailer/photofinisher customization at the beginning or end of the program.



The training tape will leverage some of the messages that consumers and store staff will be seeing in both print and TV advertising. Visuals draw from elements of the point-of-sale materials so that clerks will see the same sales aids they have in their store. It also helps explain the integration of digital with traditional photography provided by Kodak Advantix products for the Advanced Photo System.

Intensive Counter Clerk Training

The next level is a more intensive counter clerk training program. It uses a video tape and individual staff training workbooks with reference guides. These elements may be self-study or group led. The program gives sales personnel the option to explore the Advanced Photo System at the level of detail and technical depth that fits their own individual need. For instance, photo specialty staff typically want more technical depth than sales clerks serving other classes of trade. So, if the sales person wants to know just how the camera controls the final print format, the answer is provided in depth.

The sales clerk training program is organized into four sections: Advanced Photo System overview, Kodak Advantix film, Kodak Advantix cameras and image utilization and photofinishing. The curriculum takes between one and two hours to complete in one session, or it can be divided into four 20- to 30-minute segments.

The training video recreates a retail environment where sales associates talk to each other about the new system that Kodak has introduced. They teach each other about key aspects of the system and demonstrate selling techniques. In the tape, customers come into the store creating sales opportunities. Both correct and incorrect approaches are used to provide real life lessons and opportunities for a facilitator to involve the audience.

The training workbook summarizes key points covered in the video and provides more specific product details. It is bound in a three-ring binder so that the retailer or participant can add additional material, for example from a seminar, or to update the contents as new products are announced.

Certified photofinishers and retailers can add customized elements that provide more detail about their individual offerings to the tape. Or, they can add inserts to the workbooks. Games, puzzles and other exercises are included to test the knowledge and understanding of each participant.

Addressing Retailer's Needs

A retailer-driven seminar conducted by Kodak personnel forms the final level in the sales training program. The seminar can be designed to cover specific retailer or photofinisher needs. These will be scheduled by Kodak sales executives and regional management when requested. The programs can be customized for single stores or chain operations.

Kodak is convinced that this new system will make fundamental changes in the way consumers take, use and enjoy their pictures. They have created this comprehensive training package to help provide system background and give effective selling tools to the retail staff. After all, it is the individual behind the counter who will ensure that the Advanced Photo System achieves its full potential.

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