

HOME FURNISHINGS

Sub-Zero uses CRM to connect dots between brand experience, buying

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Sub-Zero Group is using CRM to engage consumers from first point of contact through to purchase. Image credit: Sub-Zero Group

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK Appliance maker Sub-Zero Group is leveraging customer relationship management tools to allow it to more effectively connect with consumers throughout their buying process.

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As an executive from the company explained during a keynote at Luxury Interactive on Oct. 16, buying a new set of appliances is an investment purchase, with whole kitchens from Sub-Zero hovering between \$50,000 and \$70,000 on average, and consumers typically spending a significant amount of time deciding. While Sub-Zero's retail showrooms are not transactional, the company has found ways to help its frontline staff engage with and guide shoppers along the purchase path, allowing it to turn leads into sales.

"These [sales consultants] are the folks that really needed some nuts and bolts training, not just on the typical stuff, but on this whole notion of the path to purchase," said Peter Furfaro, president of [Sub-Zero Group, Inc.](#) "How do we guide that consumer from the very beginning of the funnel right through to the end to secure the purchase?"

Employee engagement

Sub-Zero, which includes the Sub-Zero refrigeration brand, Wolf cooking appliances and Cove dishwashers, has 32 showrooms in the United States. These spaces are more about creating an aspirational atmosphere than making sales.

For instance, twice a month, Sub-Zero hosts events at these showrooms. Full-time corporate chefs are on hand to whip up dishes using Sub-Zero's ranges or ovens, providing product demonstrations to both consumers and members of the design community.

While these showrooms serve as a place for consumers to learn more about the company's products, they are not transactional. This means that interested buyers must go through a separate retail partner to make a final purchase.

For Sub-Zero, this is a challenge, as it is sending more well-informed consumers out into the market, where they could choose to buy from its brands or a competitor.



Sub-Zero hosts events in its showrooms. Image credit: Sub-Zero

Over the past year and a half, Sub-Zero has been working to help close this loop, by engaging consumers throughout the process. Whereas the company used to use tools such as Excel spreadsheets to keep track of clients, today it has upped the sophistication of its CRM program by working with a third party.

Another key part of its strategy revolves around its frontline associates. Showroom consultants go through training at the company's headquarters in Madison, WI to not only learn about its appliances, but also teach them how to interact and establish relationships with customers.

For instance, when a customer calls a showroom, Sub-Zero has its consultants set appointments and get contact details, allowing them to follow up.

Once prospective buyers are at the showroom, consultants offer advice as well as provide justifications for the products. When consumers leave, they are given a summary of the appointment, and consultants discuss next steps with them.

These leads are then passed along to dealer partners, allowing them to take over. This transition also allows Sub-Zero to see who followed through on a purchase.



Peter Furfaro

Through this strategy, the company has found that 44 percent of its market qualified leads from its Web site visits, showroom walk-ins or phone calls turn into buyers.

Some of the engagement tactics that Sub-Zero has found effective include using short, organic emails and maintaining control of the conversation, avoiding phrases such as "let me know." Mr. Furfaro also suggests giving customers simple choices.

Food for thought

Outside of its showrooms, Sub-Zero has been connecting with consumers over food.

The company recently brought back its Fresh Food Matters initiative with new influencers and media outlet partnerships to promote the importance of fresh food and ingredients.

Sub-Zero's Fresh Food Matters campaign is hosted on a dedicated Web site and features videos and posts from a variety of partners. Along the way, Sub-Zero is hoping the increased consumer-awareness of the importance of fresh food will drive customers to purchase its home appliances and storage units ([see story](#)).

Beyond appliances, brands are looking to make the buying process simpler through their retail partners. For instance, Toyota Corp.'s Lexus is paralleling the disconcerting experience that can be had at dealerships to a maze in a recent creative campaign, as the automaker looks to revolutionize the car-buying experience.

"The Maze," made in creation with agency of record Team One, touts the debut of its new dealership experience named Lexus Plus. The concept has been established in 12 different markets and promotes transparency and negotiation-free pricing ([see story](#)).

Sub-Zero has similar simplification goals.

"These are projects," Mr. Furfaro said. "For any of us who have done renovations or built a home, we fully understand the importance of the kitchen, and we understand how difficult it can be. And the intent is to make it as simple as possible."

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