

BEHIND THE NEWS

Basic training

CAN TRAINING
DELIVER MORE
MOTIVATED
STAFF?

SIMON KING

TALKS TO SOPHIE
LANGHAM TO
FIND OUT HOW



Class act: Sophie Langham believes that classroom training is of limited value and that far more can be accomplished in the store environment

Ask most retailers how well they think their staff are trained and you'll get a similar response – they receive good basic training, they would like to do more, but time pressure combined with the need to ensure a well-manned shop floor prevents them from doing so.

Ask most manufacturers how well they think retailers are trained to sell their products and the response would be virtually unanimous – they would desperately like to do more, but they are restricted, firstly by their own lack of field resources and secondly by their inability to get to the front-line sales staff.

Sophie Langham, who was formerly head of training at satellite broadcaster Sky, claims that the biggest problem isn't an unwillingness on the part of retailers to train their staff, it's more a logistical problem. Staffing lev-

els themselves mitigate against it.

Ms Langham, who continues to work for Sky, but has recently set up her own company, Ease Consulting, said: "Go to any retail park anywhere in the country at 11am and you'll see three, maybe four people tops, manning the shop floor.

"No sane store manager is then going to allow one or two of those staff to leave the shop floor to attend training.

"As the day progresses, more staff do appear, but as trade picks up it is still rarely possible to release staff."

Ms Langham continued: "Manufacturers are faced with a problem. Those who are lucky enough to have a field team can take their chances and train staff on the shop floor.

"Or they can attempt to train them

Homer run: Sophie Langham worked at Sky for nine years, where she was latterly head of training

“Store staff are interested, they do want to learn and they get as frustrated as everyone else that their training is often incomplete”

individually away from the shop floor and end up spending a whole day delivering a training session that could and should take just one hour."

Manufacturers that don't have a field team have an even tougher challenge, according to Ms Langham.

All they can do is supply materials direct to the retailer and hope that somehow the information gets passed on to the staff on the shop floor actually selling the product.

Ms Langham said: "The real opportunity lies with those who work in the store, because, contrary to popular belief, they are interested, they do want to learn more and they get as frustrated as everyone else that their training is often incomplete.

MOTIVATION

"Motivating these individuals is the key to success as by getting them on-side the manufacturer creates a network of ambassadors for their products.

"And motivation isn't just about who's paying the biggest spiv that week. People are motivated by knowledge, by appreciation and by success.

"I strongly believe that, if manufacturers and retailers capitalise on this, they will see an uplift in the standard

of knowledge throughout their stores."

Ms Langham worked at Sky for nine years, where she was responsible for the launch road shows for Sky Digital and then for Sky+.

She is also responsible for Satellite Retailer of the Year, the leading competition, sponsored by Sky, Astra and *ERT Weekly*. She also developed Sky's latest training venture, The Sky Specialist Programme.

She said: "It's still early days, but already the results have been really positive.

"As part of this year's Satellite Retailer of the Year competition, we mystery shopped around 1,500 retail outlets and we found that on average stores who had joined the specialist programme performed around 17 per cent better than the national average."

She added: "It doesn't matter if you're selling satellite TV or washing machines, training is all about engaging staff, creating the desire to learn, exciting them about your product and providing a framework and incentive to progress themselves.

"Achieve these things and the results will speak for themselves."

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