

Mega Magic Q & A: Panel of Experts Reveals What You Need to Know

By Lisa Arrigo, Editor in Chief

Mega retailers such as Wal-Mart and Sam's Club carry enough weight in the marketplace that suppliers need to keep their products in top priority status. CHEM.INFO magazine, in collaboration with its sister publication, Food Manufacturing, is providing advice on how to succeed in this complex retail arena through its webcast, "Mega Magic: How to Become a Go-To Supplier to Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, and Other Big Box Retailers." The free webcast focuses on how suppliers can address the expectations of mega retailers and their demands for additional services, improved order fulfillment reliability, and better efficiency. It can be viewed by going to www.chem.info/megamagic and clicking on the "On-Demand Now" link. The webcast includes presentations by Matt Kistler, vice president of product and packaging innovation for Sam's Club, Wal-Mart Stores Inc.; Nikki Baird, senior analyst of business process and applications, retail, for Forrester Research; and Scot McLeod, senior vice president with Ross Systems. The second half of the webcast is a question-and-answer discussion between the panelists and audience members. Below is a sampling of this Q&A session.

Q: If a product proposal is submitted, for example through Wal-Mart/Sam's Retail Link process, and is rejected, how can a manufacturer find out what is lacking in the proposal?

Matt Kistler: Review the proposal ... there may have been something that you may have forgot to think about ... but then after that, there're nothing wrong with resubmitting, and there's also nothing wrong with finding out who the buyer is — or in some cases, the DMM or GMM over that category — and having a conversation with him about why, in fact, it was rejected.

Q: Suppliers can play a role in helping retailers deal with and understand consumer habits. Can a supplier go too far and become an annoyance by providing too much feedback?

Nikki Baird: You have to differentiate between providing consumer data and providing consumer insights — the biggest difference there being that insights are something you can act on and something that has direct relevance to the manufacturer/supplier and retailer relationship or direct impact on how the two of you are going to serve the consumer. So, throwing a bunch of data at a proposal or around a product is not going to be very effective. It has to be much more driven towards what's actionable — how is this going to benefit both of us.

Q: With the current focus on the environment, what is the best way for an

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environmentally friendly cleaners company to become a supplier?

Scot McLeod: Many companies may be taking the right measures to ensure product quality and safety today, and they've invested a lot in their internal processes and procedures to have those internal assurances, but they've got to be able to provide that external assurance as well. They need the audit trails. They need that trail of information that goes right along with the product. We've frequently referred to it as a product genealogy that starts small with each ingredient or each part that goes into the product, and it builds on itself. But with that audit trail in place, it's very easy for anybody at any time to determine "how safe is this product" or "how green is this product," and it's right there. It goes right along with the product. And if done correctly, it's really very little overhead on the business as well.

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