

CONVENIENCE STORE DECISIONS

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Well-Connected

Duncan Oil is on the verge of doing something almost unimaginable: getting all of the data-generating devices in its stores to talk to one another. *Find out how on p. 52*

The well-connected Duncan Oil team includes (l to r) CFO Steve Walls, President & CEO Roger McDaniel and VP-Store Operations Don Gose.

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CSD Leadership Issue
Coverage of the National
Convenience Store
Advisory Group
Spring Conference
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The "P" word

Chip Bell, as it turns out, was the perfect keynote speaker for the National Convenience Store Advisory Group's Spring Conference last month. He thundered into his time slot, first thing in the morning, with both barrels blazing. Woke us all up. Told a few good stories. Then hit us right between the eyes.

The secret to attracting and keeping loyal customers is not necessarily making them say "Wow!" every time they come in your stores, he said. Nor is it found in constantly exceeding their expectations. That's a great goal, Bell says, but the fact is, you simply can't do that continuously.

Instead, Bell said, make your customer a *partner* in your business and you'll hook 'em for life. How do you go about doing that? By treating them like your wife. Pay attention to the little details that are important to them. Listen—*really* listen—when they talk to you. Be careful not to betray their trust. Don't keep score, and don't feel like you always have to have the upper hand. Never stop courting them. And above all, don't neglect them.

The "P" word—"partnership"—is perhaps one of the most abused and misused in all of business. But in this context, Bell, who heads a company called Performance Research Associates, was right on the money.

But for me and the rest of the staff of *The Convenience Group*, Bell's message had a different kind of

urgency—because we were sitting in a room full of *our* new customers.

As the new owners of the National Convenience Store Advisory Group, we view the retailers and suppliers who attend the conference as *our* customers—and we want to partner with you in that business, just like we do with 42,000 of you who read *CSD* every month.

If we buy into what Chip says—and we do—that means we have to treat our relationship like a marriage. We have to listen when you tell us what you want in a conference. We have to pay attention to the details that will create an experience worthy of your time and investment. We have to continually court you with a provocative program, great networking opportunities and a chance to have some fun in the process.

As "honeymoons" go, the Spring Conference in Dallas certainly seemed to get us off on the right foot. Chip Bell wasn't the only speaker to hit us between the eyes; "Professor" Dick Meyer's presentation on the dynamics of cigarette reporting was a real wake-up call in terms of how we measure the growth not only of our largest product category, but our entire offer.

"Swapshops" such as the ones conducted by Louie Sheetz and Jim Beck of Gate Petroleum on fleet fueling and Bill Andrews on recruiting and screening methods were worth the price of admission by them-

selves. James Farhat did a great job of explaining the next generation of c-store technologies, including the Web, in layman's terms, and retailers were introduced to potential new profit centers such as photo processing, check-cashing and (believe it or not) insurance.

A highlight of the store tour was a new QuikTrip, and the networking opportunities, especially the new Eagle's Nest hospitality suite, were well-received. As for the golf—well, you know what they say about golf: "A bad day on the golf course...."

But what's important is whether you, the customer, got a good return on your investment. If you were there for the meeting, tell us what you thought about it; what you liked and didn't like and how we can improve it going forward.

If you weren't there, read through our coverage beginning on page 30 and give us your thoughts about how our conference might be able to serve your needs. You can contact me at the number or e-mail address listed above. Also, you owe it to yourself to check out what's happening with the National Convenience Store Advisory Group. Your next chance is coming up September 7-10 in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, where the theme for the Fall Conference will be "Best Practices" and the golf will be spectacular.

We look forward to seeing you there—partner.

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