



Need a Lift?

Technology's **product demonstrations** help boost sales

BY KAREN M. KROLL

Selling consumer electronics can pose a number of challenges for retailers. The products are complicated and contain a variety of features, many of which change on a frequent basis, making it difficult for even the best salespeople to keep current.

To enhance its sales environment and help associates boost their ability to sell consumer electronics, Nebraska Furniture Mart introduced "Lift" technology from MTI Interactive in its three stores.

As its name suggests, Lift technology detects when a customer has removed an item, such as a digital camera or cell phone, from its display in order to examine it more closely. When that happens, Lift activates a product presentation on a display screen located near the item. The monitors can range in size from six to 42 inches; most measure 17 or 19 inches.

"The best way for customers to learn and explore products is through compelling demonstrations," says Jay Buchanan, electronics division director for Nebraska Furniture Mart. The presentations can convey a tremendous amount of information quickly and clearly, aided by the use of visuals. For instance, they may describe the features of different cell phones, or explain the technology behind high-definition television.

The Lift technology runs about \$2,500

per screen above and beyond the merchandising system used to provide electricity to the product and tether it to the shelf, says

Jason Goldberg, vice president of marketing for Hillsboro, Ore.-based MTI, but retailers can deploy the Lift system in various ways that help rein in the cost.

For example, some use it just for products located in premium positions, such as end caps; others may link several products to one centrally located screen. Some retailers add a portion of the cost to the slotting fees they charge manufacturers.

Two-phase implementation

Nebraska Furniture Mart has deployed Lift technology on digital cameras, cell phones, home theater systems and GPS devices since October 2006. The company's implementation of Lift technology will come in two phases. Buchanan and his colleagues are just concluding Phase One, which consists of rolling out the interactive digital sign-

age to various products in the company's stores.

Phase Two will include switching from regular to touch-screen monitors. That way, a customer looking at a product like a cell phone can learn about a particular phone's features and benefits on the first screen. With a touch, the second screen will pop up, and explain network technology. A third screen could outline various calling plans. "It would be an easy-to-digest visual presentation," Buchanan says.

Getting to this point involved some growing pains for Nebraska Furniture Mart. Most challenging has been ensuring the reliability of the system: Buchanan says the goal was 100 percent conformance 98 percent of the time, and it has taken some time to achieve.

The efforts appear to be achieving results, however. Consumers questioned in exit interviews say that they remember the products associated with Lift more than other products displayed in

the stores, according to Goldberg, and retailers have seen sales increases of 20 to 30 percent when the technology is deployed.

Customer interaction with merchandise has

increased since Lift was deployed, Buchanan says, though just how much is difficult to say; Nebraska Furniture Mart didn't track the frequency with which customers would pick up or handle products before it installed Lift. "When you have a compelling showroom with a well-merchandised floor and interactive [displays], customers can't help but pick up the devices," he says.

Rolling out the Lift system required an investment of several hundred thousand dollars in each store, but management is convinced that the investment will pay off. Nebraska Furniture Mart expects to recoup its investment within 18 to 24 months.

STORES

Karen M. Kroll is a business writer based in Minnetonka, Minn.

SALES INCREASES
20-30%
with Lift merchandising technology