

# MeetMax

MAKING MEETINGS WORK

## Incentive Travel Programs That Work

### Connect the Customer: A Sales Incentive Program for HD Supply Electrical

Incentive travel programs are expensive to run, challenging to manage, but when done right can generate increased sales and customer loyalty. As an online registration software provider that specializes in working with clients who run incentive travel programs, we see many different kinds of incentive programs. We sat down recently with Joanne Pastrana, a Marketing Specialist in the HD Supply Electrical & Plumbing/HVAC Marketing group, and a MeetMax client since 2008, to talk about what makes the Connect the Customer program so successful.

*Tell us a little bit about the Connect the Customer program.*

**Joanne:** At HD Supply we run an incentive program in our Electrical business called “Connect the Customer”. Our goals with the program are simple: increase sales and increase customer loyalty. We ran the first program in October 2008 and it is an 18 month program. Each time we run the program, customers can earn a luxury trip based on their sales volume during the program.



*Has the program achieved its business objectives?*

**Joanne:** Over time, definitely. We started the program just as the economy dipped, and the Connect the Customer results in the first year were impacted by the economy just as everyone else's was. In the second year, we were very pleased with the increases in sales and customer loyalty that the program generated. And we are on track for the 2011 program. The feedback we've gotten from the customers who participate is all very positive – they are excited and energized by the trip.

*What are some of the hallmarks of the program that contribute to its success?*

**Joanne:** First and foremost, we design a truly luxury trip. We pick a AAA four or five diamond resort and try to minimize our customer's out of pocket costs, including no additional food and beverage costs. And, of course, we cover the airfare.

*Where are some of the places you have gone?*

**Joanne:** The first year we went to the



Dominican Republic; in 2010, the trip was to The Breakers in Palm Beach, Florida.

*What does a typical agenda for the trip include?*

**Joanne:** The trip is typically five days long and we plan a relaxed agenda so they can enjoy their vacation. We arrange convenient flights for all of the guests. The next day would typically be a free day, with maybe an organized, optional, activity like volleyball or cards in the afternoon. That evening we organize a group dinner – someplace interesting. Last year we did dinner on a yacht cruise. The third day we have arranged an optional set of activities, and they can each select one. We make sure that our sales reps and supplier partners have an opportunity to spend time with their clients, during these activities. Dinner would be on their own. The fourth day again is an open day; we'll have a farewell dinner, usually with a theme. And then on the fifth day, they head home. It's a great combination of relaxing vacation and spending time building relationships between customers, sales representatives and supplier partners.

*How do you structure participation in the Connect the Customer program?*

**Joanne:** Well, the program design has changed over time. In the first year, we had a tiering system. The highest tier earned a luxury trip for themselves and a guest. The middle tier could purchase vouchers for the trip. And the lowest tier participants were entered into a contest to win a prize – jet ski or snowmobile. We didn't include any activities in the trip, in this first year; any excursion or activities a participant wanted to do, they had to arrange and pay for themselves. We had 300 participants that year. In 2010, we redesigned and simplified the program and again had about 300 participants. We took out the two lower tiers, and focused the goal of the program to earn the luxury trip. We simplified attainment goals that the customer had to purchase in order to qualify. We added a

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buy-in option, so that based on level of attainment they could purchase additional trips. Pricing for the additional trips varied depending on the level of attainment. And, we enhanced the trip itself by adding an activity into the package – spa, golf, deep sea fishing etc – that they could choose when they registered. We send out monthly emails or postal pieces to let each customer know their current status. Because of the changes we made in the design of the program, when the program concludes, we know and they know exactly what their performance level is.

*And, that's the data that you import into the MeetMax system to open registration for the trip.*

**Joanne:** That's right. We provide you with the program results data in a spreadsheet to be imported into MeetMax. Then the MeetMax registration system is programmed to present each customer participant with their options for additional trips, and pricing, based on that participant's level of attainment. When they

register, they tell us what days they want to travel, who their guests are, and which activity each guest would like to participate in, and pay for any additional trips they want to purchase.

*When you were selecting an on-line registration system, what were you looking for and why did you choose MeetMax?*

**Joanne:** We wanted a registration system that would be flexible, would be easy to use for us behind the scenes and for the customer, and robust enough so that we could customize it to be visually pleasing. We needed to be able to create a website for the trip, one that would be a good marketing tool and would get people excited about the program. We needed to be able to reflect the program design – level of attainment, number of additional trips they can buy and the pricing for each – in the registration system in a way that was simple and easy to use for the customer. And we needed a system that would give us accurate counts and up-to-the-minute data to manage the trip. We researched other sites and found MeetMax is the best fit and is a good value.

*Can you share with us an example of how MeetMax works well for you?*

**Joanne:** The reports on the Activities is very useful. I used it to match people up – creating foursomes for golf or putting 6 people in a boat for deep sea fishing – and the report made it easy for me to see whose clients had signed up for the activity so that I could match them with their associate. Plus, your customer service is outstanding. Every time I call, I get someone on the phone who can help me. They come up with solutions that work, even when I don't know exactly what I want.

We are very satisfied with MeetMax.

*Looking ahead, what are you planning for 2011?*

**Joanne:** Our 2011 Connect the Customer is underway, and the trip this year is to Sonoma California in October 2011. We have the event marketing website up and running in MeetMax. And, we are doing a new incentive program in our Plumbing division – a trip to Las Vegas in March.



If you would like to learn more about MeetMax and how our online registration system can help you effectively market and manage your incentive travel program, please contact MeetMax sales, 518-691-0442, or by email to [meetings@twst.com](mailto:meetings@twst.com).