SupplierSpotlight
Tastes and Tips ™
sample. solve. save.

By Haley Bateman // Photos by hudsonphotos.com

Sample, solve and save. By investing in a Sam’s Club membership, members gain access to a unique opportunity where they can experience a taste of money-saving innovation at its finest—literally. The Tastes and Tips program is one way that Sam’s Club continues to evolve and to help its members find affordable shopping solutions.

In 2009, Sam’s Club expanded its vision for product demonstration. And through the help of Shopper Events, one of the nation’s leading providers of field marketing events and brand activation, Sam’s Club was able to breathe new life into the demonstration program. Shopper Events currently manages the Tastes and Tips program at Sam’s Club. As members wind through the aisles of the club, they can stop along the way to sample products before they purchase them.

Matt Herlevic, the head of the Sam’s Club Demo Team, recently shared with Celebrate that the main focus of the Tastes and Tips program is about member engagement. “Tastes and Tips is our lighthouse. When you walk into Sam’s Club, you can see the Tastes and Tips cart. It draws people. They know they can go there and get a solution.” In addition to crossing paths with members, Tastes and Tips rely on the expertise of event specialists to run Tastes and Tips events.

Behind each Tastes and Tips lighthouse stands an event specialist, ready to engage members as they browse through the aisles. These specialists use the late Sam Walton’s ten-foot rule. They try to engage every member that stands within a ten-foot radius of the cart in a conversation about the product. These specialists follow a “gree’t, sell, sell” method and bring a thirty-second sampling experience to life. As Mike Muccio, Vice President of the Shopper Events Sam’s Club Team, says, “Whether it’s by providing a money-saving meal solution idea for a family gathering or by adding a little fun to the shopping trip by our specialists wearing a costume to promote the latest DVD movie release, we are able to educate members and have fun at the same time.”

In addition to a fun atmosphere, the program also advocates safety. Mike Muccio states, “It’s pretty amazing when you do the math. This year the Tastes and Tips program will facilitate approximately 500 million one-to-one interactions between Sam’s Club members and our event specialists.” With so many Tastes and Tips events, the program works tirelessly to ensure food safety. Event specialists are highly trained in food safety precautions so that members have nothing to worry about at Sam’s Club. In addition to food safety, Shopper Events and Sam’s Club make customer satisfaction a top priority. In fact, one of the highest scores Sam’s Club receives in member surveys is for the demonstration program.

The program is expected to grow in the coming years as Shopper Events and Sam’s Club continue to reinvent and to innovate. Shopper Events not only oversees Tastes and Tips, it also manages the Walmart brand Bright Ideas. Event specialists use similar techniques at both Walmart and Sam’s Club to offer Walmart customers and Sam’s Club members a similar experience. Both brands achieve the same goal: enhancing the experience of the shopper and offering affordable shopping solutions.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of both Tastes and Tips and Bright Ideas is that both programs are run simultaneously by two companies: Sam’s Clubs, while CROSSMARK manages others. When asked about the success of two competitors working together, Matt Herlevic replied, “It works brilliantly and I couldn’t ask for two better partners that work together for the benefit of Sam’s and Walmart. They are very professional in how they handle that relationship.” The two companies work together seamlessly to ensure consistency and efficiency.

In the future, the Taste and Tips innovations plan to improve their connection with members through technology. The Taste and Tips teams will continue to reinvent the program as technology evolves. As Herlevic argues, the company has to evolve to react to members’ needs. In fact, there are a growing number of Tastes and Tips events for non-food categories. Mike Muccio states, “With the combination of Sam’s Clubs’ robust demo program results paired with the continued industry trend to interact, educate and influence shoppers at the point of purchase, we are seeing more and more Health & Wellness, Home Improvement, and Consumer Electronics brands building out programs.” It seems that in the coming years, members will continue to experience a taste of innovation.