

Nation's Business[®]

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MARKETING

Satisfying Customers' Appetite For Knowledge

Consumer education can be a worthwhile investment, as Trillium Health Products, in Seattle, has found. Trillium is capturing and keeping customers' attention with "intensive" consumer education, says co-principal Bob Lamson.

Consumers are interested in better nutrition, and the information they seek is "pretty diffuse," he says. "We try to package it in a way that is easily interpretable" and tie it in to the company's products.

Trillium manufactures a juice machine, which it sells to retail stores and, via seminars, to consumers. The company's nutrition seminars are the keystone of its marketing strategy. The 130-employee firm keeps four nutritional specialists on retainer to serve as seminar speakers.

Part-time and temporary employees manage administrative details at each seminar, which can accommodate from

300 to 1,000 people.

The company, which has grown to \$80 million in sales in 1991 from \$1 million in 1989, also publishes a monthly newsletter on nutrition and health, and it sells books, audio tapes, and videotapes.

Although many of Trillium's competitors position themselves in the small-home-appliance business, Lamson says, Trillium sees itself as selling a way of life. "People are focusing on quality of life as opposed to standard of living," he says.

Lamson says his firm's customers are pragmatic consumers who buy products not because of any hard sell but because of tangible benefit. With the juice machine, the buyer also receives recipes and information on not only how to use it but also when and why to use it.



PHOTO: DOUG WILSON-BLACK STAR

No hard sell: Trillium Health Products' co-owners Bob Lamson, center, and brothers Steve and Rick Cesari.

Lamson offers this advice to firms that want to reach today's consumers: "Try to educate people why the product you're offering affects the quality of their lives. If you can show that, how it works, then the sale is automatic. You don't have to hard-sell at all."