

Q&A

CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMERS

RBH LAUNCHES CONNEXIONS
TO BUILD RETAILER
RELATIONSHIPS

BY LAUREN EARLE



Bernard Uys, manager of trade marketing and retail engagement, Rothmans Benson & Hedges

There is no shortage of challenges facing c-gas tobacco retailers, but tobacco is a destination category that will continue to attract adult tobacco customers, as long as retailers can take advantage of resources and provide the right product mix in their stores.

That's why Rothmans Benson & Hedges offers digital and educational tools to their retailer customers. They also launched their new Connexions program in September, which provides retailers with increased support on RBH products in an effort to enhance the relationships between retailers and RBH sales representatives.

We recently sat down with Bernard Uys to discuss how this new Connexions program will impact the c-gas industry.

YCM: *Can you describe your role at RBH?*

Bernard Uys: I'm the manager of trade marketing and retail engagement. My team primarily works on programs to engage and educate retailers about RBH products and programs, as well as the tobacco category in general.

YCM: *What challenges and opportunities do you see for the c-gas tobacco category?*

BU: Contraband tobacco continues to be a big challenge, especially in Ontario and Quebec, but it is gaining traction out west and in Atlantic Canada, as well. Contraband tobacco can lead to significant losses in revenue and when retail locations are forced to close, jobs are lost, along with the essential services that c-gas stores provide to the community. However, we can all play a part in combatting contraband. If you suspect illegal tobacco trafficking, contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477. In addition, you can let your RBH sales representative know so we can better understand the impact.

And when it comes to opportunity, the tobacco category is a powerful generator of foot traffic for the c-gas channel and often leads to incremental sales of other products. However, legal age tobacco customers are very brand loyal, particularly premium smokers. When a legal age smoker leaves your store to find their product somewhere else, you risk losing that customer forever. As such, c-gas retailers should leverage the tobacco category by diligently managing the category. This includes ensuring availability and carrying relevant new products. Your RBH sales representative is there to help you determine the right product mix for your store, and RBH's new Connexions program will help ensure you have easy access to RBH products.

In order to protect their tobacco business, c-gas retailers should continue to demonstrate that they can responsibly sell tobacco products to legal age smokers in compliance with provincial and federal regulations.

YCM: *Why is RBH launching Connexions?*

BU: Our continued success as a company depends on even stronger relationships with retailers. Our new approach will ensure more meaningful interactions in stores and give retailers access to additional benefits to help grow their businesses. That's important to us because when retailers succeed, we succeed.

This unique approach has our top-ranked sales force as its foundation. While Connexions delivers business efficiencies and better distribution and availability of our products, it also frees up time for our sales force to work with retailers on growing their business. Better data means individual sales reps will now have a better understanding of the market each store operates in, and Connexions means both the sales rep and the retailer will have more time to tailor sales strategies that work for each store.

RBH sales reps will bring value by showing retailers how they're performing compared to their direct trading area. RBH sales reps can make product recommendations based on what products sell in a store's direct trading area. As they also have an idea of the preferences of legal age smokers in the area, sales reps can recommend the products and innovations they think are relevant and will do well in that store.





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YCM: *How does Connexions impact retailers?*

BU: The benefits include trade programs tailored to individual stores (with the opportunity to receive automatic trade program allowances), first-in-market access to RBH products, and preferential pricing. To take advantage of these benefits, some retailers may be required to change the way in which they get RBH products to their store. For those who already order through one of our contracted full-service distributors, nothing changes, as these distributors will continue to deliver RBH products with the Connexions benefits.

Those retailers who are eligible and sign up for direct delivery are choosing Connexions because of the many benefits, and also because of the ease by which they will be able to order and receive products.

YCM: *How important is innovation to RBH, and to the overall e-gas tobacco category?*

BU: Despite a highly regulated environment, there are still opportunities for innovation. The key is for retailers to know their customers, utilize the expertise of their RBH

How does the RBH Connexions program work?

In September, RBH is providing retailers with greater opportunities to build their businesses:

- The Connexions program will allow the RBH sales force to improve relationships with retailers to help them grow their businesses, using better information, store-specific programs, and automatic rebates.
- Connexions retailers who get their product via DSD will be able to place their orders for RBH product directly from RBH, using an online ordering portal, call centre or fax.
- Retailers who are not interested in the advantages that Connexions will bring to their store are still able to receive product through their current authorized supplier. These retailers are encouraged to discuss their businesses with their RBH sales representatives to ensure they fully understand all of the benefits that come with Connexions.
- At this time, Connexions facilitated though DSD will not be offered to retailers in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

sales representative, and ensure that relevant, innovative products are available in their store. Then, they should ensure that they and their staff are able to locate the product and answer questions from legal age smokers about the product, if asked. RBH Connect is a great tool for retailers to learn more about products, and RBH recently launched RBH Connect/*frontline* to educate frontline staff.

YCM: *What does an engaged RBH Connect retailer look like?*

BU: An engaged retailer logs into RBH Connect about once a week to see what's new. Often there are educational activities available that will reward the retailer for participating. These educational activities are developed with the goal to support the retailer in managing the tobacco category in his or her store.

Retailers also use RBH Connect to review the performance of their store compared to their direct trading area – this valuable insight can help retailers build their business. **YCM**