

Accentuate the positive

Karen Bevan, winner of the Merial SQP of the Year at the House of Lords, believes that ensuring a customer has a happy and successful shopping experience and a commitment to training are essential for today's SQPs



Karen Bevan can't stop laughing. She's tickled pink to have won this year's OvertheCounter SQP of the Year and exudes a positive attitude that has clearly won over her customers, as well as this year's judges.

It was a particularly difficult year to make a final decision, as the judges said there were plenty of strong candidates who clearly showed their commitment to their jobs as SQPs and to the wider profession. So to win against such tough competition just shows the level of standard Karen has reached since joining the profession 27 years ago.



Plenty to smile about! Karen Bevan, centre, with Adam Henson, left and Roddy Webster, Merial Animal Health, right

"I believe that the CPD system is paramount to the future of our industry"

She has been in her present job at Carmarthen & Pumpsaint Farmer, in Carmarthen, Dyfed for the past two years and loves her work. "I am a farmer's daughter and farmer's wife and I have always enjoyed the outdoors and farm life – I was milking when I was 10 years old – and I understand farmers needs and sympathise with them," she says.

UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER NEEDS

The judges felt that it was evident that Karen clearly understands the importance the SQP has in ensuring the correct product is prescribed

to customers and is not afraid to refuse a sale if necessary. "I believe that I have an excellent rapport with the customers that I deal with," she says. "I understand their needs and try to help them as professionally as I can. I try to be as objective as possible and yes, I have been known to refuse to sell a product if I didn't think that it was fit for purpose!"

Karen says that putting her customers first and lifelong learning are key requirements for her job as an SQP. "I believe that without the customer, we don't have a business and if you can gain their respect then they will reciprocate that respect."

The panel of judges was impressed by Karen's commitment to the ongoing training of both herself and the team around her. "I believe that lifelong learning is highly important in this

industry to keep abreast with current issues and as such over the first CPD period up to June 30th 2011 I achieved 448 CPD points.

"I was also responsible for ensuring that all our SQPs obtained their required number of points and I am currently compiling a series of question papers to be approved by AMTRA for CPD points. I think that CPD is important because not only does it keep people up to date and refreshed, but it also reiterates and reminds SQPs of their responsibilities."

Clearly Karen's attitude and disposition have had a positive influence on her customers. She recounts the time she helped out with a customer's TB tests. "A customer wanted a product to use the next day while the cattle were all in having a TB test. The product wasn't available in that branch but was

available in another branch 30 miles away. In order to help the customer out I said that I would get the product to her by 9pm that evening. I phoned the other branch, the branch manager took the product home with him and I picked it up from his house and then went to the farm and delivered it by 8.55pm. A round trip of nearly 100 miles was done that night and I didn't get home until 10pm. They passed their TB test and all the cattle were wormed and vitaminised (if there is such a word!) resulting in happy animals and a satisfied customer."

UPDATING KNOWLEDGE

Training and passing on her knowledge are also key passions. "I believe that the CPD system is paramount to the future of our industry and with the forthcoming Euro-

pean review on distribution channels I think if we can prove that we have professional people in place and that they are continually updating their knowledge then that will go a long way to safeguarding our future. I have also helped a number of our staff achieve their SQP status by giving them mock exams and helping them with their projects."

She's happy to work out of hours to achieve results. "I have organised a number of farmer open days in conjunction with suppliers over the last 12 months and organised a number of in-store promotion days within our seven branches. I have also written quarterly animal health newsletters, which have been distributed to all our account customers. I visit our branches on a regular basis to do animal health audits and ensure that all our SQPs are up to date on any changed in regulatory issues. I was fortunate in January 2011 to be re-elected onto the AHDA council for a second term of office."

In between all this industrious work Karen still has time for a winning smile for her customers. "Customer service is all about ensuring the customer has a happy and successful shopping experience," she says. "It is about satisfying customers' needs and leaving them wanting to return for more. It's all about doing the little things that go a long way – like having a smile, being friendly and courteous, saying hello, giving good advice, having products available and making sure deliveries are done on time." She makes it all sound so easy!