



## EDITORIAL

# ETHICAL LAWYERS, HONEST POLITICOS, & SERVICE ORIENTED RETAILERS

JUST AS AMBULANCE CHASING lawyers pay lip service to “upholding the ethics of the legal profession,” and politicians carrying brown paper bags filled with cash hold forth about their “dedication to public service,” every retailer on the planet will go on at great length about their “commitment to customer service.” Retailers we’ve met who are “dedicated to serving the customer” include those who wait to see what kind of car the customer drives up in before putting a price tag on a piano (people in Mercedes like to pay more); m.i. dealers who dismiss price tags altogether and keep background music turned up loud enough to prevent anyone from overhearing what other customers might be paying (“If everyone paid the same for something we’d have chaos on our hands”); those who rely on bait and switch advertising (“That \$399 Les Paul in the flyer? It’s that one over there with the crack in the neck and checked finish”); not to mention the others who sell recent trade-ins as new; offer warranties they have no intention of honoring; or those, who through ignorance or malice, woefully misrepresent the products on their floor. This isn’t to say that all retailers are morally deficient, but just to point out that talk is cheap and that the concept of service is honored more often in word than in deed.

The definition of good service is ultimately in the hands of the customer. Whatever they say, goes. At a time when retailers are rapidly adding or expanding stores and battling for market share, we thought it might be appropriate to take a look at the service issues from the customer’s point of view. A recent national consumer survey conducted by the Roper Organization offers some useful, if not unexpected insights.

In an era of two career spouses, making the most of limited time is voiced as a critical concern. Thus, 70% of customers reported that they invariably buy from the first store they visit. 25% would go to a second store, and less than 5% would bother visiting a third location. This concern for time is also reflected in a majority reporting that they would only wait an average of 3 minutes before leaving the store. (The message? Customers leaving empty handed generally signify larger internal problems.)

70% of customers base their opinion of a retail establishment entirely on their assessment of the salesperson they dealt with. In other words, an inconsiderate moron on the sales floor can effectively negate good merchandising, great selection, and clever promotion.

The research also indicates that a person who has a positive experience at your store will tell 6 people. A person with a negative experience will tell 41 people. Thus, you need 7 highly satisfied customers to offset just one disappointed customer. Translated: no one can afford even a few disgruntled customers.

Some of our readers will dismiss the findings above saying, “Yeah, but the music industry is different. We’re a specialized market and our customers aren’t like the masses at department stores or Wal-Mart.” There’s no arguing that music products represent a niche market. But, specialization doesn’t mean that m.i. customers like to waste time in dingy showrooms, waiting to be taken care of by indifferent clerks who don’t know what they’re talking about.

The fact that customers want prompt service, good displays, and an alert, responsive sale staff is hardly a revelation. Yet it’s surprising that so many retailers (both large and small) fail to consistently address these issues. Those looking for some guidance should turn to the profile on Columbus Pro Percussion in this issue, a case study in what service is all about. Proprietors Jim Rupp and Robert Breithaupt back up their talk of “service” with a showroom that’s stocked to the rafters with everything a drummer could possibly want; salespeople who know the product and greet customers with a smile, and a thriving teaching program that is nurturing a new crop of customers. Because of this potent combination, when a Sam Ash store opened down the street, their business didn’t miss a beat.

Columbus Pro Percussion is a story about successfully earning customers’ patronage through hard work; not just blathering about “customer service.” The operation should be an example to other retailers, especially those who are facing intensified competition.

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