

Newsletter # 19: “Mystery Shop Your Business” September, 2009

I am so amazed by this recent customer service experience that I have to share it with you. ***This is a true story; I have not exaggerated any of it.***

One Friday morning a few weeks ago, I received an e-mail promotional piece from a well-known local communications agency. It was nicely done; if I wanted further information, I could reply to the e-mail or call the phone number listed.

- **STRIKE ONE**

That Friday afternoon, I called. The phone rang and rang, no answer, no roll-over to voice mail. Nothing. Checked the number, called again, same thing.

- **STRIKE TWO**

I hit “Reply” to the e-mail, immediately received an automated “MAILER-DAEMON” e-mail in my In Box, “Recipient address rejected: No such user.”

- **STRIKE THREE**

Then I went to the agency’s website and found the “Contact us” page. I dutifully filled out my e-mail, name, company and phone (no space for comments). *I have yet to receive a response.*

- **STRIKE FOUR**

A second promotional piece came two days later. This time when I called, I went into automated voice mail. I left a message for the agency’s president. *I have yet to receive a call back.*

- **STRIKE FIVE**

I noticed a hyperlink on the e-mail: “For more information, click here.” You guessed it – the hyperlink didn’t work, I received a “HTTP Error 404” page from Internet Explorer.

Of course, any ordinary prospect would have given up after Strike One or Two – I was pursuing it out of curiosity now. But it’s been several weeks and despite my going to great lengths to contact this agency, ***NO ONE HAS EVER GOTTEN BACK TO ME.***

Is this insane? Why would you go to the expense of creating a campaign and then totally drop the ball? And this is a communications agency. Would you hire them?

MORAL OF THIS STORY

So, other than for the shock value, why am I sharing this experience with you?

- The obvious lesson here is to **pre-test anything that goes out from your company.** Ideally, have a third party read, test and react to it. And alert your staff that there may be calls coming in.
- Once your communication piece has gone live, immediately do some **mystery shopping and test again from the perspective of a customer.** (Mystery shopping is done to measure the quality of retail service or gather specific information about products and services, anonymously. There are research firms who specialize in it; I do it for some of my

clients.) Does everything work the way it should (links, landing pages, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc.)?

- **But don't wait until your next promotion to do mystery shopping.** Make a habit of regularly checking on some important communication basics for your business:
 - Is your website loading correctly (check both Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox)? Are the links working?
 - Who answers "Contact Us" inquiries, and how quickly? What's the message?
 - Call your company's main phone number and see what you get. A burdensome menu? An unprofessional receptionist? Infinite-loop voicemail? How about an automated company directory that asks you to spell out the person's first AND last name (yes, I've come across that)? HELP!

Give up? So will your prospects!

Moral: Don't be like the communications agency who fails to communicate – make it easy and pleasant for your prospects and customers to reach you. Your business's reputation and success depends on it.