

A store I ignore

The other day, I needed a special computer cable so I decided to start calling around to see if I could find a store that carried it. I did not want to drive to Gulfport or Biloxi or even Slidell unless I knew that a store had the particular cable.

First, I called a well known national electronic store. Following the usual canned message, I pressed “3” to indicate that I wished to speak with a sales representative. A lady answered my call and I asked her if they carried the particular cable. She asked me to hold on and she would transfer me to a sales representative who could help me. The call was transferred and it rang and rang for about 30 seconds. Then, I expected to hear the familiar speech that would tell me that “Your call is important to us. This call may be monitored so we can provide more efficient service. All our sales persons are busy at present with customers. Please stay on the line and your call will be answered by the next available sales person.”

A few moments later, I heard a click. I thought someone was about to answer it but, alas, the click meant that the phone hung up.

I decided to wait about ten minutes and call again. Following the same routine as before, I waited and waited and waited for at least ten minutes, when it happened again. It seemed as if someone picked up the phone and then decided they couldn't be bothered with another customer and so they hung it up.

I called back a third time and went through the same routine. I told my first human voice what had happened and she said, “I see a sales person near me. Please hold and I will ask him to check on it. A minute later, a gentleman picked up the phone. I asked if they had the particular cable in stock. Almost immediately, he said “No.” and hung up. Maybe the guy was having a bad day and he just couldn't be bothered. Then, again, I realized I had called in the middle of the day in the middle of the week, so the store could not have been that busy with customers.

Then, I realized something a friend had told me about his experience at that particular store. He had picked up a modem and proceeded to the cashier's desk to pay for it. He had noticed that many of the salespersons were busy playing computer games on some of the computer displays in the store. He waited and waited but no one bothered to come and check him out. After a long wait, he finally asked for the manager of the store to lodge a complaint about the service. The manager indicated that the salesperson needed to practice playing the computer games so that they could become more knowledgeable of them and be in a better position to help possible purchasers. My friend never went back to the store again.

I decided to call another particular electronic store to see if I could find the particular computer cable. This was also a nationally known computer store. The reception I received was quite a contrast to experience at the previous store. The woman who answered the call was courteous and checked to see if they had the particular cable in stock. She found out they didn't have it. “Let me check with some of our other stores in the area to see if they might have it,” she volunteered. She put me on hold and finally, she returned with some good news. One of her company stores in the area had it and if I wanted it, they would leave it aside for me and it would be waiting for me when I arrived.

The next morning, I headed out for my 3 a.m. bike ride. I used the opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned. Some distance later, during my ride, I noticed some portable toilets along the trail. They were placed there for people working with the oil spill. Now, they were being used by construction workers who were working on rebuilding the beach road. As I passed one, I was met with a perfumed aroma that seemed foreign to the expected aroma.

I discovered a hidden message. No matter how perfumed the outside may be, it cannot always mask the expected aroma inside. No matter what the appearance, colorful sales-pitches of a store; what matters is the aroma, atmosphere, attitude and service inside. Now I know that it is best to buy at a store that serves rather than ignores.