

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

# Retail First-Responder

My cell phone rang as my wife and I pulled up to the bed and breakfast for our anniversary. It was the security company; the alarm had gone off in one of my shops. We were two-plus hours away, and it was Saturday evening. I couldn't get my managers on the phone, so we turned around. When we got to the shop, I learned the central motion detector had malfunctioned and needed to be replaced. My getaway was shot.



Soon after, I awoke in the middle of the night to a phone call. The security service wanted to let me know the alarm had gone off yet again. I raced to the store, which is 45 minutes from my home. The window had been smashed out, but luckily, the alarm did its job and scared off the looter. Unfortunately, my workday began at 4 a.m.

After that incident, I decided to create an emergency action plan for employees. You can't predict everything that can go wrong, but you can get some piece of mind knowing you and your staff are prepared. A manual seemed too complicated. (Can you imagine a first-responder looking through a manual to decide if he needs a Band-Aid or a bed sheet to stop the bleeding at the scene of an accident?) I thought it more important to have updated contact information in one central place.

## WHAT TO INCLUDE

I began creating my retail first-responder kit by asking the glass company employees for at least 10 business cards that listed a 24-hour emergency service number. Each of my employees received that card, and we taped one laminated card to the sales counter, so staff could easily find it.

That area of the sales counter also became our emergency meet-up area — similar to the area your family picks to meet at (a mailbox or oak tree) in case your house is on fire and you scatter. The sales counter now has a list with every staff member's contact information, along with numbers for our plumber, general contractor, HVAC repairman, IT person, security company, locksmith, police department, fire department and so on. The list does not include

vendor numbers — only contact info for people who make the business work and keep it safe.

If I'm abroad and the roof starts leaking, I don't want employees waiting for me to stop the water from coming in. (And there's not much I can do from 5,000 miles away.) This gives my staff the authority and means to solve the problem.

## KEEPING BACKUPS

We also ask each employee to keep a copy of the list on his or her smartphone or tablet, along with a backup copy on a home computer. Managers are given the answer to our security-code question. This way, if they set off the alarm by accident, they can communicate with the security company when it calls the police.

Of course, you want to get permission to have everyone's contact information so readily available. Also, even if you don't list manager and employee contact numbers, you still need a list of anyone who can replace glass, stop the toilet from overflowing or figure out why your entire network crashed. Having a first-responder plan of action in place may save your business from serious loss. It may just save your anniversary weekend, too. **MI**

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**Keeping updated contact info in one central place could save you from serious headaches**