

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Phone Marketing 2.0

Last month, I talked about using a Web-based approach to holiday marketing. OK, so let's say you've Facebooked, tweeted, YouTubed and updated your Web site. Now, your phone rings. Staffer Billy grabs it while eating a doughnut. "XYZ Music." He swallows. "You're looking for what? You saw what on our Web site?" You've just witnessed a fatal flaw in your holiday marketing: your people's phone skills.

Customers who discover retailers on the Web still call the store. Your digital marketing will look the same for every customer who sees it, and your store displays will remain constant. But the experience customers receive can be different each time they call or visit. This is where you can lose sales and lesson sign-ups.

Your staff needs to be as consistent as your online marketing and your in-store merchandising. Overlook this potential flaw, and you'll only have limited success. You don't want customers who respond to your online efforts getting blown off on the phone or in the store.

Usually, the best sales staff are busy selling. The weaker ones or newest hires are not, so they're answering the phone. Remember that first impressions over the phone are just as important as first impressions in person. Therefore, you need to put as much effort into your telephone training as you do your Web site and YouTube page.

PHONE-CERTIFIED

Let's start with this idea: Do you really want everyone answering the phone? You don't have people repairing instruments unless you know they're competent technicians, so why not have phone-certified staff members? These people should look and sound as good as your online marketing experts.

The store greeting should be short and sweet. "Happy holidays. Thanks for calling XYZ Music. This is Sam. How can I help you?" Train the staff to be upbeat and not too fast on the delivery.

Also, make sure they display proper posture and don't lean on the counter. They should look the same speaking on the phone as they do talking with customers in person.

Show them how to put the phone on hold. It sounds bad when it's left live on the amplifier. And make sure these salespeople know essential store

information, such as hours, directions and services.

SPREAD CHEER ALL YEAR

If Santa were answering the phones at your store, customers would come in. Why? He knows how to be friendly and cheery. It sounds weird, but a lot of your staffers text on their cell phones more often than they talk. Making conversation is becoming a lost skill.

Educate your staff on how to be friendly and cheery. Teach them to ask questions, such as "How are you doing?" and "Who are you looking to buy this for?"

Also, teach them to listen for answers. Let them know that most incoming callers aren't musicians but gift buyers. Leave a quick telephone reference guide near the phone or saved on a computer next to the phone. The guide should describe what's being promoted on your social media sites and Web site. A great telephone call can inspire that decision to buy, and a bad one can send the customer to the next store.

Last, evaluating your staff's performance is important. Don't assume that they're doing everything you've taught them just because they've been trained. Daily reminder huddles are a must. **MI**

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