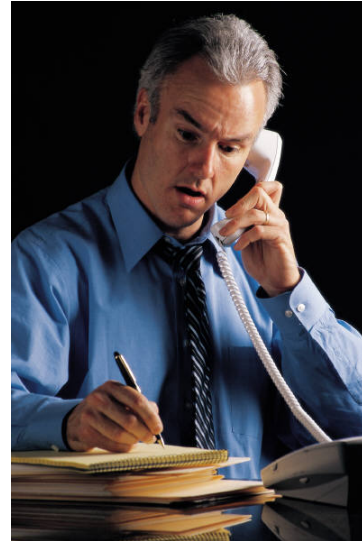


## Don't forget the phone when it comes to impressing your customer!

By Craig McAndrews

When it comes to interaction with your customer, the telephone is one of the most overlooked items in retail today. How do I know this you might ask? For starters, when retailers are asked what type of training they provide for handling phone calls, the most frequent response is, *"what do you mean by phone training?"* The other obvious tell all is what you hear when you call around to stores as a shopper. I recommend everyone try it themselves. Call around to a few of your competitors to see who "makes the best impression". Odds are that you will not be "wowed" by anyone.

The number of phone calls you receive from customers on a daily basis could vary greatly depending upon your advertising strategy. If you advertise using print vehicles, then you might receive more calls than if you advertise using electronic media. However, the fact remains that consumers are calling stores at a higher rate today than they were several years ago. My theory is based on the lack of time we all have today, to drive from one store to another, as well as the proliferation of ads bombarding us everyday. The telephone becomes a great way to "pre-shop" before venturing out to shop. Personally, I remember people calling the store on Thursday and Friday to prepare for the weekend shopping adventure. *"Just doing my research"*, the caller would say. *"Great, we will be open all weekend; do you know where we are located?"* I would reply.



The point is to make sure you define what you would like to accomplish with each caller during your time on the phone. If the call to your store sounds the same as every other store in town, where do you think the caller will decide to shop?

In an effort convert a caller into a store visit, keep two things in mind. Make sure you engage the customer in some type of conversation so that they will remember you, and make sure they know where you are located. Unless you are the only store in town, odds are they will drive by several of your competitors before making it to your store. In my experience, I have seen many sales closed when a customer stopped into the store thinking they were at another mattress store. Specific directions with key landmarks are essential.

Look at it this way. A large percentage of your initial customer contact comes through the phone. If you want to increase the number of people who come through your doors, make sure you have a plan for delivering an impression over the phone that guarantees your store will make the list of "places to shop for a new mattress".