

## The Pick Pit

Dante's *Inferno* is the first part of his great work, which I have not read at all, *The Divine Comedy*. I have good reason to believe our Distribution Center was designed after the book, because it was a lot like Hell, and I always had the suspicion someone somewhere was laughing his or her ass off at us as we worked to implement it. Sometimes things are just so bad you really come to believe they are part of a greater design, and the Pick Pit, the center of the inferno, just had to be planned that way. Just like life itself, there was no way to really prove that it sprang into existence out of some primordial ooze, so there had to be a creator somewhere. Someone somewhere was messing with me, and I was now a creationist.

According to Wikipedia, which is not an acceptable primary source of research for anything but I use it anyway, when Dante passes through the Gates of Hell the inscription on the gate includes the classic line "Abandon all hope, ye that enter here". This is just one proof in a series of proofs that Hell was better than the Memphissippi Distribution Center. At least when Dante went into Hell there was a sign saying "Abandon hope". At our Distribution Center, there was no such sign warning us of our impending doom. In fact we had some opposite, motivational signs, that indicated if we worked hard and smart as a team, things would be great! Which was not true at all.

You dear reader have no idea how much time we wasted having hope, and believing in the project, and believing in ourselves. For some of us it took months, months of our lives that we will never get back, before we abandoned all hope. If we had only had a gate with an inscription on it like the Hell Gate, we would have saved so much time and energy.

Just like Dante's version of hell, we had a nine level concentric Pick Module at the heart of the Distribution center. The first level was room temperature storage, and the other levels were underground, each having a different storage temperature, with the lowest level at 20 degrees for the deep freeze needed for long term storage items like fruitcakes.

Dante's first level was limbo, for the good people who died unbaptized. Ours was dildos, lingerie, whips and other adult toys and merchandise from our sister companies Naughty Girl and Dirty Ho. They had been brought in to help us cross merchandise our tasty treats with our sister companies products.

Sextron had started originally in a back alley in New Orleans providing adult entertainment to sailors with shore leave. Later it expanded under the Dirty Ho brand to all major ports in the US and Canada. It acquired Naughty Girl novelties to expand into other adult themes, later adding Bondage Bitch leatherettes and other brands. 95% of our sales were to men, with sailors being a core market.

Some how or some when it was decided that we needed to appeal to the ladies more, and our board of White Male Directors thought and thought for days "what do ladies like" and "how does it relate to our core brands"? After much thought it was determined that ladies liked tasty treats. They could be used as part of the seduction, and as part of the post seduction. We needed treats to expand the customer base, and to grow the top line, and that was what led to Sextron acquiring first Brownies, and later other smaller cake businesses.

Once acquired, we needed to do some synergizing, and that was where the cross-merchandising came in. First we realized that Dirty Ho Dildos should be packaged with Ho Ho Chocolate Cakes (with white cream filling) in a festive holiday themed package called Dirty Ho Ho Hos. As a special part of the promo, the roll like Ho Hos received an extra bit of molding until they looked anatomically correct, if you get my meaning.

The plan was to sell the Dirty Ho anatomically correct Ho Hos in mass merchandisers, so we brought in a lot of inventory. Much to our surprise the Wal marts of the world did not buy into the idea that America needed this type of Christmas promotion. Some of them were even repulsed at the idea of families gathering around the Christmas tree, opening up packages of dildos, then calmly munching on anatomically correct chocolate Ho Hos with white

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cream filling (picture Mom, Dad, little Jimmy, and Aunt Tootie all munching away on that chocolate goodness, working to get to the creamy center).

Dante's second circle was lust. Ours was leatherettes. They were warm leatherettes, in a slightly humidified room so they would not crack. Keyfob, the diminutive child sized female VP found a Darth Vader Child-sized leatherette with helmet that she liked to wear when she was in Mimphissippi. When she assigned the Little Marine to Memphissippi she made him wear a gladiator leatherette, and stay oiled up all the time.

The Little Marine also was periodically forced to wear one those Hannibal Lector type wire mesh muzzle by HR. While Hannibal had to wear his because he would try and bite your ear off, the Little Marine had to wear his when he said something stupid that even HR could not ignore. Usually he would have to wear it for a week or so. When this happened he would also add studded spike-like accessories to his leatherette. I have no idea why and really do not want to know.

Either way, oiled up, spiked, muzzled, and sometimes lead around a leash by Key Fob, he tended to stay mostly on levels one and two, so the rest of us tended to move towards lower levels.

Level three for Dante was Gluttony, and that was our first cake level. Here we kept the mega packages or 96 individual cakes for sales through Costco and other warehouse food stores. Each cake had about 500 calories, so if you were looking for a smart purchase option on 48,000 empty calories for the kid's lunches, this was the product level for you. We sold a lot of product off of this level. Our plan was to leave no thin child behind on our nation wide march towards obesity, and our team on this level was very committed to that goal.

Dante's fourth level was Greed. In Dante's inferno this level was filled with those who were excessively miserly with wealth, and those who squandered wealth. Two extremes with the same flaw. For us, the fourth level was intended to be one of the high volume levels, and here a data war broke out over replenishment strategies. The debate was between running "lean" with a dynamic and disciplined replenishment flow form the Hell Bay, or running a little heavy on inventory, with extra materials to handle spikes in demand, and to improve customer service. At the center of the problem was the mistake in structure of the fourth level itself. The pick locations were just too small. You really could not put enough materials in a location to last the shift. When you sent extra over, it piled on to the floor and you started to not be able to tell what location the boxes should be associated with. When you replenished, often the wrong box went into the wrong location, and our shipping errors went up.

For a long time we denied the shipping errors existed, but when Troop 216 of the Sacramento Little Flowers Girl group went door to door selling Nasty Girl dildos instead of their trade mark cupcakes, we had to admit the problem existed. We only learned of this when their Troop leaders tried to re-order. It had been the best fund raiser ever for the group, and they wanted to extend it. Since the volume was good, we repackaged the Dirty Ho Ho Ho promotion and gave it them as a big discount. They were happy, we were happy, and it was all for a good cause.

Eventually we had to expand the locations for this level, and we did get better at replenishment, but those who were greedy to have excess, and those who wanted to run "lean" still each thought they were correct.

Dante's fifth level was Anger. All our levels were anger-filled, but this level was rough in that it was one of the first freezer levels, so when you got made and threw a cake at someone, it was frozen and it hurt. The Little Marine rarely came to this level as the cold made his nipples hard, and Keyfob like to twist them pretending they were dials on a radio. If you heard someone yelling "Hello Soldiers, this is Tokyo Rose!" you knew pretty much what was going on.

Dante's sixth level was heresy. Our sixth level was overrun with C.L.O.W.N.S.S. who were sure their bag of six sigma tricks was the answer to everything. A lot of the tools were pretty good, but it was the application, and the arrogance of the application, that really made you long for the lower levels, where hell got the nastiest.

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Dante's seventh level was Violence. Dante's violence was broken into violence against people and property; violence against self (suicide); and violence against God. I think we covered them all pretty well in the Pick Pit, sometimes on the same day. We were definitely killing ourselves, being killed by our management, and using a lot of swear words. The Lord God's name was definitely taken in vain.

Dante's eighth level was fraud. Ours was where we kept most of the consultants. We set up little card tables with laptops for them. The accountants and lawyers would sit there when in town as well. When the Queen of Tarts was in town pandering was also seen.

Dante's ninth level was treachery. He had traitors to guests segregated in one hell bucket specifically. One thing we did was reach across Sexton for help. We told everyone "come on down to Memphis" and sent them pictures of Beal Street and Graceland. When they came down they learned quickly that 12 hours a day, 13 days on, 1 day off meant you did not go to Graceland. Soon they stopped coming.

There were other treacheries, maybe the worst being the one where it was declared "Mission Accomplished" and you were told you could go home. Home we went! I cannot tell you how happy people were when after 6 months or a year of this crap they got to go home and be with their families, in their houses, and work only 8 to 10 hours a day. It was an incredible feeling. But then two weeks later it would be discovered it still sucked in Memphissippi, and we would go back again, and not be allowed to leave for more months. Sometimes they would tell you on Monday you were being sent home for good after Friday, and then on Thursday change their mind. We all learned pretty fast to not tell our wives we were coming home, because it was no fun telling them "Just Kidding" three days later.

Maybe the Memphis Distribution center was not "created" or "planned" by some cosmic ass-raper. Maybe it really was just a bad C.L.O.W.N.S.S. project or a bad strategy launched by a deeply mediocre management team with a twisted leadership culture. It will take years before I will be able to decide for myself. Either way, I am not going to read Dante's Inferno, and I am still going to use Wikipedia like it is a primary source even though it is not.

Signing Off now this is TOKYO ROSE!