

This Business Break column is entitled “Neat, clean and organized” but it could just as easily been named, “The importance of making a good first impression.” Even though the majority of people entering your shop are repeat customers, in today’s competitive marketplace it only makes sense to treat every customer through the door as if it was their first time in your shop. One way to do that is to put your best foot forward during all contacts with the customer starting with the appearance of your shop right through to the final sale.

In today’s business world there is no one answer that fits all situations but neither are there any contacts with the customer that are so unimportant they can afford to be overlooked. Making sure your shop is neat, clean and organized on a daily basis plays a very important role in setting the tone of your business for both your customers and your employees.

With today’s causal dress codes it is impossible to judge a customer, their occupation or financial status by their appearance but you can be assured that either consciously or subconsciously your customers are judging your business by its appearance. The outside of your business



Business Break

Neatness Counts

should convey a “welcome” message. If you have a parking area it should be free of debris and if the lot is lined it should be painted at least yearly. An outside trash container located near the front entrance gives your customers somewhere to dispose of sandwich wrappers, coffee cups, soda cans and other unwanted items before entering your store. If your shop is a non-smoking environment an approved cigarette disposal container located near your entrance will prevent the unsightly collection of cigarette butts that will otherwise accumulate. Make sure both of these containers are emptied

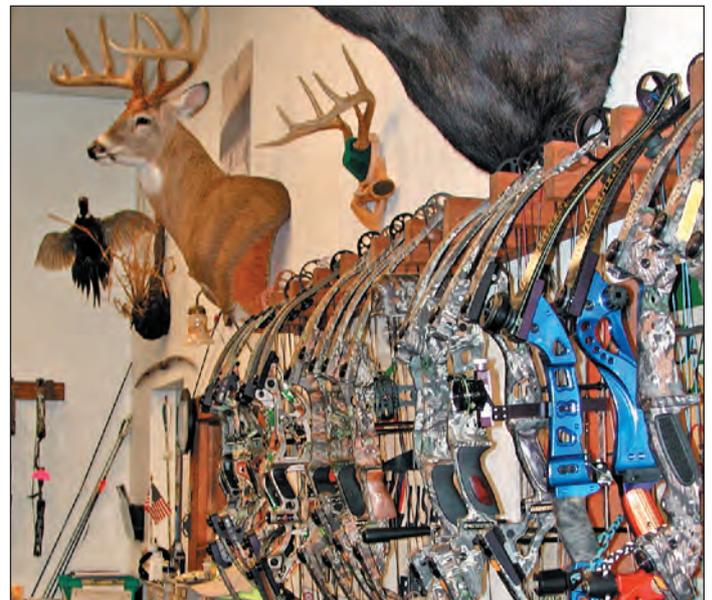
on a regular basis.

All glass at the entrance such as on doors or display windows should be cleaned daily and window displays should be orderly and fresh. Changing your display windows sends your customer the message that your shop is current with their needs and that you are constantly offering new items for their consideration. Placing door mats at the entrance can greatly cut down on dirt that gets tracked into the shop especially during periods of inclement weather.

Proper lighting makes your shop’s atmosphere pleasant and



This sporting goods store has a showroom that is neat, clean and organized. The area is well lit and the merchandise free of dust and attractively displayed. The aisles are clear allowing the customers easy access to all sections of the shop.



Neat, clean and organized is not just a good rule for the merchandise, it applies to the entire store. The game mounts here are clean and well maintained. They contribute to the creation of a positive and professional impression for the customer.

inviting in addition to accenting the appeal of your merchandise. Ensure all lighting is in working order and keep replacement bulbs on hand. According to Murphy's Law you can bet that a bulb will burn out during your busiest time and the last thing you want to be doing is sending out a staff member to shop for light bulbs when they should be servicing the customer.

Inside the shop make sure the glass on every showcase is clean and free of smears and fingerprints so display items may be seen clearly. Counter personnel should keep a rag and glass cleaner handy to wipe off any glass display case tops as these will normally need to be cleaned several times during the day.

Not only should all merchandise on display be attractively arranged it should also be clean and free from dust. Dusty items send the message to the consumer that these items are not desirable, possibly outdated and that no one is interested in them. Dirty merchandise is a defi-

nite turn off to the customer. A feather duster works great on display items allowing a quick cleaning without the necessity of removing the items from hooks.

If you have restrooms available for your customers they should be checked for cleanliness and proper supplies on a regular schedule. Nothing can be a quicker turn-off for a customer, especially a female customer, than an unsanitary restroom.

Depending upon the type of floor you have in your shop some sweeping, mopping or vacuuming will be required daily. While these can be fill-in jobs for store personnel they are normally best addressed before or after regular store hours. Depending upon the size of your operation you may want to consider a cleaning service to handle the majority of items discussed or you may want to assign specific cleaning duties to store personnel. While there are several ways to handle the cleaning task nothing will get done unless someone is directly responsible.

In spite of the fact that I visit several different sporting good shops a week I am constantly surprised by the clutter that some shops seem to overlook. I often encounter boxed merchandise in aisle ways as well as an occasional empty carton or two. Any merchandise on your shop floor should be priced and ready to sell. Storing packed merchandise on the shop floor, with the exception of prepackaged items such as tree stands, should be avoided at all cost and there is no excuse for using valuable floor space to store empty cartons. Actions such as these simply give the impression of disorganization and cause the customer to think, "If things are this messed up in the open I wonder what happens in the areas that I can't see?"

While no one intentionally plans not to be neat and organized it is something that can creep up on you if you don't make it a priority. For a number of years I held a corporate position with a large manufacturer with plants located along the east coast. I often accompanied a Vice President of Manufacturing, who was known as a bug on cleanliness and organization, on inspection tours of our various manufacturing facilities. Regardless of the preparations made for his visits he somehow managed to poke his nose into places where no one expected him to look and always seemed to focus on

Attractive well arranged displays are a great selling tool but not if they are allowed to become dirty or dusty. This display is well maintained and sparkling clean. It is not only an attention getter but is a very effective "silent salesman."

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some seemingly unimportant thing. On one such visit I watched him run his hand across the top of several lockers located in an otherwise seemingly immaculate tool and die shop. "Filthy!" he exclaimed as he wiped the dirt from his hand. "Call me when you get this place cleaned up," he said to the shop manager as he turned and left in a huff. Once we were alone I commented that I thought he had been pretty rough on that particular manager. "Think about it," he smiled with a twinkle in his eye. "The dust on top of those lockers is unimportant but if I can get them thinking about the little things I know that they will be paying attention to the big things as well. However if we only focus on the big things soon we will find that the little things we felt were not as important are getting us into trouble." I had to admit that his logic made some sense.

"Keeping our shop clean and our service area organized is a constant job," said Wil Antrim, owner of Allegheny Crossroads located near Kane, Pennsylvania. "It is important for our shop to make a good impression on everyone who walks through our door and keeping it neat and clean is a very important part of

forming that impression. This logic extends into our service area as well. I have always felt that the condition of your work area reflects the quality of your work; therefore I insist that our service areas are always kept neat and organized. It only takes just a few extra seconds to put the tools back in their place after you are done servicing a bow. However those few seconds spent keeping organized can save you several minutes of frustration the next time you need that particular tool. Avoiding that frustration allows you to work more efficiently and therefore do a better job."

While some service areas I have visited are as neat as a pin many look like a train wreck with cable, wheels, and nuts and bolts everywhere. It is not uncommon to see a technician dump his "junk box" on the workbench trying to find a specific bolt or some other elusive part. Disorganization cost time, money and can result in poor service quality. An organized service center doesn't just happen; you must make your expectations clear to your staff. Remember if you make them pay attention to the

small things they will automatically pay attention to the big ones.

Keeping a shop clean, neat and organized is important for it shows your customers that you not only care but you are proud of your operation and are worthy of their trust and loyalty. It is a job that must be shared by everyone on your staff but you must first set the example and make your expectations clear.

Editor's Note: In addition to his writing duties, John Kasun is an outdoor seminar speaker and a business consultant with experience in corporations large and small. He can be reached at 126 Hickory Lane, Ducansville, PA 16635, by phone at (814) 695-5784 or by email at kasun@aasdc.com. ←



Maintaining an organized service area can be challenging especially if more than one technician uses the same work area. However the effort involved in staying organized can save time and frustration while helping assure a quality job for the customer. Setting strict standards for the service area can also prevent conflicts between employees with different work habits.

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