

## How bad was my customer service?

### SHOP TALK



NICOLE STAFFORD

I'm dead tired of telling this story, but I want to share it for a reason.

I want you to help me communicate a message about poor customer service. We've all experienced it. Felt powerless trying to solve a problem we did not create and astounded by a company's ability to make matters worse.

If you regularly read *Shop Talk*, you'll recall my columns about a damaged couch I received, my attempts to have it repaired over the course of an entire year and how the Michigan Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division ultimately helped me get the furniture company to promise a full refund.

For those who don't know the story, here's the abridged version. I custom-ordered a couch. It arrived with a tear. After four shipments of the wrong replacement fabric, three visits by repair technicians, numerous phone calls, a formal complaint with the Michigan Attorney General and more than a year's time, a man from the corporate office called me and put the ball in my court. Whatever I wanted, they would do. We agreed I would return the couch and they would issue a refund.

Unfortunately the saga and my dysfunctional relationship with a furniture company - I'm not mentioning the name out of fairness - was destined to continue. What I will do - and here's where you come in - is ask for your responses to send to the company. There's power in numbers. My voice is just one. But if a bunch of readers who only the know the story second-hand have something to say, maybe the message will get through. With your permission, I will send copies of your letters and e-mails to the company president. It's the only way I can think of to get the message through. Read on. I'm sure you'll agree.

After my talk with the guy in corporate, I received a phone call from the local store manager, who I had been communicating with me on the matter, and we arranged a date for couch pick-up. I requested a letter stating a refund would be remitted when the couch was received. You know, something in writing.

Well, that met a sigh and something about how we don't have forms for that. I suggested he create one, in other words, type a letter. It came, handwritten on company stationery. Very professional.

Anyway, the day of couch pick-up, I left work early and returned home for the wait. After the majority of my "window -of-time" passed without either a visit or phone call, I got nervous and called my work voice mail to check for a message.

Sure enough, the delivery truck driver had left a message at work. He needed directions. But why call me at work? Wouldn't I be home patiently waiting for his arrival?

Next, I had a few words with the local store manager and left a message with a corporate guy, who, believe it or not, never returned my call. In any case, I accepted the store manager's apologies and agreed to set up a second appointment. I wanted to tell him the couch was on the curb and he could pick it up anytime, but, stupidly, I didn't.

Well, the day before the second scheduled appointment, the company failed to call and inform me which part of the day I needed to be home, which was their standard practice. Since I was on vacation, I stayed around the house until 2:30 p.m. Nobody showed. Nobody called. Miraculously, I received a full refund in the mail two days later. So I cashed the check and I decided I'd simply wait to hear from the company.

A week later, I receive three panicked voice messages from the store manager saying he had just learned I had received my refund and needed to pick up the couch as soon as possible. Frankly, at this point, I didn't care. The couch could go to charity, as far as I was concerned. Being reasonable, I called back to set up a third appointment. The manager suggested Wednesday. To which I said, no, because I didn't want to leave work, and I didn't feel I should be inconvenienced again. Okay, Saturday, he suggested. Okay, I said.

Then, something came up, something social, I admit. But let me ask you, would you turn down hanging out with a friend on Saturday because somebody might show to pick up the couch? No response. Then he suggested Wednesday again.

"No, I'm not taking off in the middle of the work day to do this," I said.

How about June 2. No, I said because it's my birthday. Bad moods and birthdays don't go together.

"Well, I need to pick up the couch within two weeks," the manager insisted, adding, "And, as I've told you, we only come to your area on Wednesdays and Saturdays."

Eventually, I ended up giving a lecture on audacity, and he said he needed a call corporate if the couch couldn't be picked up within two weeks. I said "please, call them. I think they need to know."

The following day I placed a call to the man at the corporate office who knew the story. He apologized, thanked me for my patience and assured me he'd do everything he could to make the pick-up happen in a way that was convenient for me.

Well said, but far too late, I thought. What do you think?

## Beauty boom

### Today's woman has choices galore at the cosmetic counter



New look: Yanna Davidou of West Bloomfield (right) gets a makeover from Shelley Smith, a Lorac makeup artist, at Nordstrom in Troy. The retailer hosted a cosmetics event featuring a runway show of beauty trends (below).

BY NICOLE STAFFORD  
STAFF WRITER

It's 8:30 a.m. on a Saturday and there are more than 300 women seated in chairs around a platform on the sales floor at Nordstrom in Troy.

The Somerset Collection store hasn't even opened yet, begging the question: what are these ladies doing here?

They've come of their own will - in fact, reservations were required - to learn about trends in beauty and cosmetics. Highlights of the event, which Nordstrom presented to the public for free, would include a runway run-down of makeup trends, as well as appearances by Estee Lauder Vice President Teresa Selvaggio and the creator of Tony & Tina Cosmetics, who goes simply by Tina.

After the show and several prize drawings, there's a mad rush to the cosmetic counters downstairs for free makeovers with one of the many company makeup artists brought in for the event.

"It's very difficult to make a choice now because there's so much out there," says Yanna Davidou, a West Bloomfield resident who turned out for the show and scheduled a personal appointment with a makeup artist representing Lorac, a never line of cosmetics.

If you hadn't noticed, the marketplace is rife with beauty products. There's also a new wave of upscale and "edgy" brands in the business.

Stop by a Sephora store where the phenomenon is overwhelmingly apparent. The French beauty boutique chain with retail locations in Troy at the Somerset Collection and Novi at Twelve Oaks Mall has literally hundreds of products on hand for shoppers to test, lounge and purchase. The proliferation of upscale, specialty and "edgy" cosmetics is

what drives the retailer, on-line beauty web sites and independent beauty boutiques like Lori Karbal in downtown Birmingham and Ruby's Balm in West Bloomfield.

And while a handful of makeup lines graced department store sales floors a decade ago, most major retailers have larger cosmetic departments with at least one or two off-beat lines in the mix.

There's also more buzz about beauty products. Fashion magazines regularly feature editor's picks among the latest products, as well as news on items coveted by the stars. Likewise, cosmetic companies do more in the way of publicizing their lines and providing services to customers. Most brands have makeup artists that tour the nation, giving free makeovers in department stores, and today's cosmetic company founders, like celebrity fashion designers, make public appearances.

"There's so much more beauty information coming at women," explains Estee Lauder's Selvaggio. "So they're demanding more of a choice and better services."

In any case, women don't seem to mind being overwhelmed, as if the all testing and looking and trying is part of the beauty of being a woman.

"Women want to be aware of trends and then be able to make choices about whether to participate," adds Selvaggio.

And, though recent product trends, such as "multiples" or items that have more than one cosmetic use, truly address modern living, there's a plethora of playful and less practical merchandise to be had.

But again, many women, if not most, embrace the frivolous nature of the industry. "I don't know why I love this," says Davidou, halfway through her makeover. "I just do. I love the makeup, the beauty. I'm always trying new things. It's fun."



Retail, style and special store events are listed in this calendar. Please send information to: *Malls & Mainstreets*, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. By fax, (248) 644-1314. E-mail, nstafford@oe.homecomm.net. Deadline for publication is two weeks in advance.

### SUNDAY, MAY 27

**OPENING CELEBRATION**  
P.R. Haig Jewelers, 311 Main Street in downtown Rochester, continues its grand opening and relocation celebration with special discounts, prizes, drawings and a show of the latest jewelry designs, through June 2. For additional information, call (248) 652-3660.

**HOME & GARDEN SHOW**  
The Somerset Collection's Home & Garden Show 2001 continues through June 24, North Grand Court. The event features a two-story Italian-style home facade and a 5,000-square-foot garden. For more details, call (248) 643-6390.

### TUESDAY, MAY 29

**SPA WORKSHOP**  
Margot's Euro Spa, 280 North Old Woodward, hosts a workshop on natural hormone replacement therapy with guest speaker Jerry H. Weinberg, M.D. of the Birmingham Menopause Institute, 7:30 p.m. To sign up for the free workshop, call (248) 642-3770.

## ADDED ATTRACTIONS

### WEDNESDAY, MAY 30

**HALSTON COLLECTION**  
View the Halston fall 2001 special order collection at Saks Fifth Avenue, the Somerset Collection in Troy, through May 31, Designer Salon, second floor. To schedule an appointment, call (248) 614-3393.

**DOWN TRUNK SHOW**  
Michael Casey's fall 2001 collection visits Neiman Marcus, the Somerset Collection in Troy, through May 31, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Couture department, third floor. For additional information, please call (248) 643-3300.

### THURSDAY, MAY 31

**CLUB MONACO COLLECTION**  
Club Monaco at the Somerset Collection in Troy presents its summer 2001 collection for men and women, 6:30-9 p.m. with cocktail reception. A percentage of the evening's proceeds will be donated to Fantagib Foundation for the Arts. To reserve a space, please call (248) 649-2665.

**AMERICAN CRAFTS SHOW**  
Westland Shopping Center presents an arts and crafts show of pieces made in America, through June 3 during regular mall hours. For additional

information, call (734) 426-6001.

### MONDAY, JUNE 4

**MAMMOGRAM TESTING**  
The Karmanos Cancer Institute mammography van visits the Women's Health Boutique, 31209 Plymouth Road in Livonia, to administer mammograms and distribute breast health awareness information. To schedule a mammogram or obtain additional information, call (734) 762-9324.

### SATURDAY, JUNE 9

**RETAIL BENEFIT EVENT**  
Rox & Sherm, 6536 Telegraph Road in Bloomfield Township, hosts the 3rd Annual Michigan Parkinson Foundation Art of Food and Wine event, 7-9 p.m. Tickets are \$76 and include wine tasting, hors d'oeuvres, coffee and dessert. To reserve tickets, call (248) 493-1011 or (800) 852-9781.

### SUNDAY, JUNE 15

**ANNUAL JEAN TRADE-IN**  
Guy's N' Gals clothing store at 6333 Orchard Lake Road in West Bloomfield sponsors their 12th annual jean trade-in clothing drive, 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Exchange clean, used jeans without holes for a new pair at half the retail price. Collected jeans are given to Oakland County's homeless population. For additional information, call (248) 861-1260.