

Big Box Brand Blunder

BY MARK NEAD

The following account is real (unfortunately). While reading, keep this thought in mind: Your brand is not what you say it is. It's what others say after you've left the room.

After a minimum of ten rings, a woman finally answers, making no effort to disguise her irritation at being bothered by yet another call. It was, in fact, her job, I thought to myself.

HOME DEPOT. WHAT DEPARTMENT?

Well, I'm not sure. I'm looking for a brush attachment for a ShopVac.

HOLD ON.

She doesn't ask for the brand name, and quickly places me on hold, subjecting me to a prerecorded Home Depot spokesperson, clearly an ex-radio personality. While not tormenting callers, I suspected he spent his time tormenting guests as a wedding DJ. You know the kind. He rambled on about no one caring more than Home Depot in finding me the right answers to all my questions. And guaranteed that there were experts on hand to walk me through my home remodeling projects of any complexity. "I can do it. They can help," he assured me.

"Really?" I thought, cynically. It struck me as ironic, seeing as though I had now been on hold for over 5 minutes. Not to mention that during my last visit to Home Depot, my simple request to have duplicate office keys made turned into an excruciating 60 minute debacle. I had the good fortune of educating a young employee on how to use the key duplicating machine — yes, the one with the simple 1, 2, 3 instructions (with pictures) posted prominently for operator reference. I offered to do them myself, but he insisted, as there were strict liability risks to consider. "That may be," I thought, "But I think the greater risk lies in the fact that you have never operated this machine before." Yep, the Home Depot tagline "You can do it. We can help" took on new meaning that day. And it didn't end there. Once I got to the office the next day, three of the five new keys didn't work.

These are the guys who want to help with the most complex of home remodeling projects? "Let's just start with the brush attachment to my ShopVac," I thought.

Eight minutes later. The same woman.

HOME DEPOT. WHAT DEPARTMENT?

You've got to be kidding me.

Yes, I've been on hold for quite a while now. A woman was checking to see if you carry brush attachments for a ShopVac.

HOLD ON.

On hold again. More agonizing gibberish about guarantees and commitments. "I have an idea. Let's keep this simple," I thought. "Guarantee that while I'm placed on hold, you're committed to solving my problem. That's all I ask." Five minutes later...

HOME DEPOT. CAN I HELP YOU?

Why have I not hung up on the is woman yet?

Ma'am, I think you're the same woman who has put me on hold twice now. I've been waiting over 10 minutes. I called about the brush attachment.

I'M SORRY. WHAT DEPARTMENT WERE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Well, I don't know! I assumed you would know the correct department to transfer me to. This is absolutely ridiculous, and I...

HOLD ON.

Before I could continue, I was conveniently placed on hold once again. I questioned myself why I was still willing to wait on hold after this ordeal? Clearly I am dealing with incompetent people who have zero interest in solving my problem, or caring even the slightest. But then, I've held this long. If I hang up, I start all over. Or, I drive there and risk wasting time if they don't carry what I need. A minute or two later...

LAWN AND GARDEN. CAN I HELP YOU?

You're kidding me, right. I assume that this isn't the department I need for ShopVac attachments. Sir, I have been on hold for close to fifteen minutes, and transferred from one person to the next. I don't know why this is so damn difficult! Could anyone there care less?

Before I could continue, I was conveniently placed on hold once again. I questioned myself why I was still expecting some divine intervention to resolve this comedy of errors. It wasn't however, funny at the time.

SIR. I'M SORRY FOR YOUR TROUBLE. NO, WE DON'T HAVE SHOPVAC'S IN THIS AREA. LET ME TRANSFER YOU OVER TO HARDWARE. THEY CAN HELP YOU.

I didn't ask for a ShopVac! And oh, yeah — Hardware. They're the ones so highly skilled in the fine art of key making. I'm sure they'll excel at this challenge as well. Oh well. "I can do it. They can help," right? God, help me.

HARDWARE. CAN I HELP YOU?

I sure hope so. The world is about to lose one Home Depot employee if you can't.

I sure hope so. The world is about...

I stopped myself.

I've been on hold for over fifteen minutes now. I have no patience left, so yes, I hope you can help me. I am looking for a brush attachment for a ShopVac.

OK. HOLD ON.

At least 2-3 minutes later...

OK. THE ONLY THING I COULD FIND IS THIS BLACK THING. I WOULDN'T REALLY CALL IT A BRUSH. IT'S ROUND AND HAS THESE BLACK TENTACLE-LIKE THINGS COMING OUT OF IT. IT IS FOR A SHOPVAC THOUGH. IS THIS WHAT YOU NEED?

I am stunned. Silenced. Would someone in the right mind describe bristles as "tentacles?" Considering the source, yes, I'd imagine they could. Maybe this is a bad episode of Punk'd? Why me?

Well, I don't know if it's what I need. Is it a brush or not?

LIKE I SAID, I WOULDN'T CALL IT A BRUSH. IT HAS THESE RUBBER-LIKE TENTACLES...

The pounding from my temples indicated it was now past the time to hang up. So I did. Several minutes later, I called Dunn Hardware, a small, family-owned place up the street. Every town has a hardware store like Dunn. They don't claim to be experts. They just are. Their staff knows precisely what they sell, and how it should and shouldn't be used. They only carry what they would trust in their own homes, so you won't find 20 brands of each product. And, if they don't carry it, they'll help you find it.

DUNN HARDWARE. HOW MAY I HELP YOU?

Yes, do you carry brush attachments for a ShopVac?

YES, WE DO, IN SEVERAL SIZES, ACTUALLY.

(Sigh. Fade to angels singing.) ■