

Yarnell-Hoffer

HARDWARE NEWS

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Sat 7:30 AM-6:00 PM

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Up All Night With Yarnell-Hoffer

This month I'm going to take you into the depths of retailing so far behind the scenes that you will probably realize that we really are insane in the hardware business. I know many of you have thought for a while that Craig is missing a few marbles and I think it's because he's been through too many of these sessions and he's a little unstable. What is one of a retailer's worst nightmares? **INVENTORY!!**

Usually once per year, every retail store, no matter what kind, has to embark upon a seemingly endless journey through time to boldly go where no one has been, sifting through the dust, counting every item and putting it back in its proper place. It's a time when the hardware and office staff of all ages at Yarnell-Hoffer come together for a massive all-night party of writing and calling out numbers until our eyes are so red we have to pass out the Visine bottles. There are lots of stories I could tell you about but I'll only go into some of the more tame ones.

First of all, let me explain what we do at inventory time. We close up about 4 pm on Saturday and tape up all the windows so we won't be distracted. The entire staff is required to attend (we wouldn't want anyone to miss out on the fun) as well as any extraneous friends we can find. The first thing we do is to round up all the stocking carts we have and equip them with computer terminals, 50 foot extension cords and communication lines. Then, we have an organizational pep talk to get everyone excited about the wonderful hours ahead and how lucky each person is to be allowed to join our club and spend the night with us. Everyone is given a task (usually in pairs) and we go to it. Each item you buy from

Welcome to the exciting world of hardware this month. For those of you in Durham, thanks for joining our reading audience. We hope you'll come in to let us help you out this month if you didn't have a chance to make it last month. We're really excited about the circular inside the newsletter this month. It's got a special order catalog for hard to find items all at sale prices.

For those of you in Chapel Hill that get our newsletter and find that it's coming addressed to "resident" instead of you personally, please don't be confused. We send everyone on the mailing list a newsletter but if you live in an area where everyone gets a newsletter your name is left off to save on the postage.

us has a five or six digit SKU (stock keeping unit) number on it that we keep track of the inventory with. The computer tracks each SKU's sales history as well as pricing, ordering and location information in the store. Instead of writing down each number and entering the information later, we roll the terminals around the store and directly input the information. We verify the amount and location of every item. Every four foot section of the store has a separate location to identify where a product is kept. It's really helpful for new employees when they're learning where to stock something. Now, you might think that doesn't sound like such a big deal. But, we have over 13,000 different items in our store and usually 4-6 of every item making about 78,000 items we have to count and verify.

There's usually a big fight who gets to be on Joy and Lynda's team since they can keypunch so much faster than we can. We simply promise everyone that they can all work with each of

them sometime during the weekend and it usually calms everyone down. There is plenty of time for everyone to work together because inventory usually takes about 200 man (or should I say personnel) hours to complete. Like I mentioned, we start at 4 pm on Saturday and work until we can't see straight Sunday morning. It usually takes until about 11 pm to finish. Lots of strange things happen after midnight to some of the staff. You would think we had been using torture treatment on them or something.

Anyway, we team up and get our cart assignments for the action filled night ahead. Each team picks out their choice of rolling office chairs to use and we go to it. The caller usually stands up in front of a four foot section and calls out each number along with a corresponding quantity. The puncher sits in the chair and types in the numbers as fast as they can. As the sections or locations are finished, we mark them off on a master map to tell how far we've gotten. It's pure excitement to be able to take your magic marker and cross out the section you've just finished. After a while, usually decided by a severe case of "NRES" (numb rear end syndrome) the caller and puncher switch places. This usually always calls for a celebration like going out back and yelling as loud as you can along with harassing the other teams telling them how slow they are. Having the NRES (pronounced n-rees) reminds me of the first few roofing jobs Craig and I did where we duct taped pillows to our bottoms to prevent our rear ends from getting numb from sitting on the roof. Needless to say, the pillow idea, which I have to add to my list of failed inventions, didn't work very well.

After about six hours of calling and punching, strange things begin to happen. I guess you could say true personalities begin to come out. It usually starts out about 11 pm with some simple chair races to see whose chair is the fastest. I remember one year Craig's back was hurting so we rented a wheelchair for him to use. It worked okay for him but he never won any of the chair races that year. From there we have a cornering contest to see who can go around the corners of the aisles at top speed without turning over. Another neat thing to

do is to sneak up behind another team and start calling out bogus numbers. By this time of the night, the puncher usually keys in the bogus numbers by mistake until they realize what is happening and a product fight ensues (like a food fight, but with phone jacks or receptacle plates, etc.). All this time, massive amounts of caffeine are being consumed to keep us alert.

The fun really starts after 1 am when everyone's schizophrenic personality emerges. We all look like red eyed zombies from outer space.

Several teams can be seen singing to each other and other team members can be seen modeling their wardrobe on top of their office chairs. The office chair modeler's name has been withheld to protect their identity. By now, each person has visited the temporary first aid station set up at the service counter fully equipped with Visine© and caffeine drinks. The numbers start blurring together so frequent caller and puncher changes are occurring. Loud war whoops can be heard now when each location is finished. Some of the more enthusiastic teams are now marking the completed aisles with rolls of fluorescent orange surveyor's tape.

At about 2 am, the arthritis in our finger joints is so bad that we call it a night. We each feel like we've been tied to the street for days with toothpicks sown to our eyelids to keep them open while being run over by Mack trucks. Our hands feel like they've been tightened flat in a vise at a 90 degree angle. Boy does the bed feel good! The only problem are the nightmares that ensue as soon as we close our eyes. We all begin to see SKU numbers racing through our heads in our sleep.

The worst part of the next morning is waking up realizing that we must trudge on to finish the job (the whole job) by the time we leave tonight. Craig and I are usually really nice because we buy everyone breakfast at the fast food restaurant of their choice before we get started. We usually finish up our two day inventory party about 11 pm on Sunday. The hard part is coming to work the next day and being fresh for work. I can remember when Craig and I used to be able to stay at work until 3 am and come in the next morning and nap until the first customer came in about 9:30 am.

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