



Hearing is Believing

ContactPoint, a customer service and sales training company, will present the keynote address and three training seminars at APRO's 2010 Convention and Trade Show. Here, company founder Jeremiah Wilson focuses on a major tool to help increase your customer base: the telephone

When Vince Ficarrotta, vice president of RNR Custom Wheels & Performance Tires, started listening to recorded telephone calls conducted as a mystery-shopping sample from his Florida-based company, he knew right away that there was an opportunity—and a need—to increase his employees' phone skills. In the recordings, he could hear the company's marketing dollars being tossed out the window. "We began looking for companies that offered mystery-shopper services," Ficarrotta says. He hired ContactPoint, a customer service and sales training company based in St. George, Utah, to help RNR improve its telephone presence and increase sales. "The follow-up training and program options gave us the flexibility we needed," Ficarrotta says. "Since RNR is a franchise group, our franchisees have different needs and different perspectives on how best to communicate with people on the phone."

Many rent-to-own businesses are turning to call-recording and call-tracking tools to improve their marketing, sales and service performance. ContactPoint's LogMyCalls technology is used by many rent-to-own companies, including Rent One, United Household Rentals, Baber's and RNR Custom Wheels & Performance Tires. "The beauty of LogMyCalls is that it gives businesses the ability to track both the effectiveness of advertising and the closing [of deals] by sales and service representatives," says Jason Wells, CEO of ContactPoint.

"Recording calls is the foundation for good sales and service training," Wells says, "and when you can actually hear the interaction between you and your customer, training moves from theoretical to real life." Having bypassed sales and service training programs in the past, Shannon Strunk, president of Mississippi-based Baber's, saw fit recently to implement the program. "Once I learned that there was an effective way to audit the system and that I could demonstrate the training results, I was on board." Strunk says. "I could hear the improvement and see the impact."





Jeremiah Wilson, founder of ContactPoint, will be the keynote speaker on July 21 at APRO's 2010 Convention and Trade Show. ContactPoint also will present three training seminars on June 20 at the event in Louisville. The company boasts almost 10 years of customer service and sales training in many industries, including rent to own. ContactPoint's patented system has been used at hundreds of businesses in the rent-to-own, automotive service, tire, auto glass, hospitality and equipment-rental industries. Its mentor system provides training, call recording, call scoring, coaching and analytics.

At the heart of ContactPoint's business philosophy is an emphasis on what's actually being sold. "Potential customers don't buy your service, they buy *you*," Wilson says. "It doesn't matter if you're the absolute best rent-to-own store in town, they have to like you." The first step in the "selling you" approach is to listen carefully to how you and your employees sound on the telephone with prospective customers. ContactPoint training focuses heavily on call recording. "From recorded phone calls, [during training] I might observe: 'When you said such-and-such, that was great!' or 'Those three things you need to get rid of,'" Wilson says. "The sale occurs the moment the potential customer likes you."

So how can you sound better on the telephone to make that happen? Here are a few tips to help turn a prospective customer inquiry into an actual sale:

REALLY LISTEN. Wilson feels that the biggest mistake employees make while talking with a potential customer is simply tuning out that person. "Employees know what they want to *say*, but they don't adjust to what they *hear*." This may cause the employee to miss a valuable piece of information from the customer—or it may cause the customer to think that his or her problem doesn't matter. "It can become mundane," Wilson says of rent-to-own employees who are interacting with customers day in, day out. "It's not fresh or new." Spending time listening *intently* to what the customer is saying, instead of just going through the motions, will go a long way toward ensuring the close of a sale.

MIND YOUR TONE. During call recording, Wilson pays special attention to tone. Even if you're not naturally upbeat on the phone, you should give it a try. "All too often, we'll hear someone say, 'That's just who I *am*,'" Wilson says. "If you can't improve your tone, then get out of this business. You have to sound like someone your customers

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want to talk to—even if you have to sit there and smile in a mirror, do it." It might seem like nitpicking, but a prospective customer can interpret your tone—and consequently, your interest in talking with them—very quickly on the phone. A sure-fire way to lose a sale is to sound indifferent or uncaring.

MAKE IT PERSONAL. "You have to use the person's name," Wilson says. "When you use a prospective customer's name, you get his or her attention." Studies show that synapses in the brain fire when certain words are mentioned—such as the person's name; that individual becomes more engaged.

BE EMPATHETIC. It's easy to lack sensitivity to a prospective customer's plight. "Ultimately, [employees] don't really care about the customer," Wilson says. "That's the hardest one for people to embrace and you can hear that over the phone. I've [listened] to hundreds of calls in the past month...and [in many of the calls reviewed] there's not true empathy. They're just desensitized." Overcome that, Wilson says, by "treating that customer as if she was your own mother."

COMMIT TO CHANGE. While these steps may seem simple—and they *are* simple—you have to want to change to make the changes successful. "Put it out there: 'I want it,'" Wilson says. "Figure out why you're not [closing sales]." Whether it's a personal problem or just a bad day, figure out why you're not as warm or caring as you'd like to be with prospective customers—and then commit to changing that about yourself.

The results of sales coaching come quickly, according to Wilson. "When your employees are liked, you're going to get an immediate increase in your closing ratio. There are the residual effects as well, such as long-term customers and referrals for new business." Proper customer-service training includes an ongoing coaching program, leading the way for continued learning and improvement.

"This type of training is not cheap, but I'm comfortable with the value," says Ernie Lewallen, president of United Household Rentals based in Cincinnati, Ohio. "The accountability is what's huge about this program. You don't lose sight of where you've been and, best of all, I can hear our managers selling more on the phone." *

See the "Learning in Louisville" feature beginning on page 26 for more information about ContactPoint's training sessions and keynote address at APRO's 2010 Convention and Trade Show, July 19–22 in Louisville, Kentucky.