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A Christian Business?

An increasing number of national businesses are on record as Christian companies. One hopes this means Christ-centered far more than merely run by people who claim a Christian commitment. That would truly be a marketplace distinctive!

The Chick-fil-as, Hobby Lobbies and Pizza Ranches of this world wear their religious orientation openly without being imposing. It might be reflected in the mission statement posted by the cash register, or on the front door sign announcing that the business is closed on Sundays. The instrumental music playing over the speakers may be worship choruses or hymns rather than Muzak versions of popular music. Everyone greets you with multiple hellos, goodbyes and fresh, smiling faces. For those of us old enough to remember the origin of the All-American youth who greeted us in the early years of Disneyland, the echo rings loudly.

Carrying such an overt Christian message raises customer expectations among believers and unbelievers alike. I was brought to renewed awareness of this when a cashier at one such place told us she did not want to relay a request we made to the manager because he yells at them if they ask such things. She was willing to point him out to us, however.

I have come to expect such customer service sloppiness most everywhere, and would think it normal for a Home Depot or Sears employee, not because they are bad places necessarily, but because they do not purport to extend Christian culture and ethics into the marketplace.

I hear "Christian Business" and I want (expect) standards to be higher. I suspect most everyone else does as well. Not only do we customers raise the standard of customer service, but when a Christian company does not achieve them, our negative opinion might be stronger and deeper than it would be for a company from which we expect no such greatness.

In the end, claiming to be a Christian business might not expose the enterprise to grace, but to the ironic and strict application of legalistic expectations held by the customer.

It seems, then, the best way to be a Christian in the marketplace is to live it long before assigning ourselves the label.

-mark I vincent

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