

# catalog

S U C C E S S

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## MERCHANDISE

# Product-Quality Assurance

By Donna Loyle, Editor

**S**watersnags, off-spec measurements, unglued socks liners in sneakers, moldy wooden toys, and incorrect care, content or country-of-origin labels—poor quality merchandise can make a cataloger reluctant to buy again from a particular manufacturer or vendor.

“The quality issue has long plagued merchants,” says Doug Easley, global sales and marketing director at **Quality Corrections and Inspections (QCI; www.qualitycorrections.com)**, a Duncansville, PA based firm that salvages and refurbishes goods for some of the largest catalog companies. What can you do when your goods arrive in less-than-top-quality condition, and how can you ensure that the problem never surfaces again? Easley offers the following solutions:

- **Set up expected quality performance measurements with each vendor before agreeing with each vendor before agreeing to purchase goods.** Ask prospective vendors to show you their quality-audit systems. Do the plans look sound and reasonable? If not, communicate exactly what you expect and by when. Put everything in writing.

Also, ask to see samples of the goods you’re considering, and give the samples to your inspectors for comparison when the goods arrive at your site. “Quality should be part of the ordering process, not an after-the-fact procedure,” says Easley.

- **Set up a quality audit process.** Use this to match what vendors say what you should receive against what actually gets delivered to your warehouse.

When you encounter problems, have the vendor’s auditors address and advise you—also in writing—of how the issue has been resolved, so it’s unlikely to happen again. Set up charge-back or return-to-vendor policies and use them before you agree to buy that vendor’s products again.

“One of my mentors in the catalog business once told me, ‘Don’t believe everything your supplier tells you,’” says Easley, who once worked as a merchandising manager at a large business-to-business catalog. “Make vendors show you exactly how something was resolved, not just promise a resolution.”

- **Devise a sound returns policy.** Before your next catalog drops, have in place a plan for what to do with products if they come back to you. Such a plan may include sending the goods to a refurbishing company that will fix the items and return them to you. Or you could earmark them for sale to an inventory liquidator.

Having a process in place ahead of time helps ensure that items aren’t piling up in a corner of your distribution center and getting destroyed there. “We see far too many catalogers that don’t have a return policy in place,” says Easley. “And some of these catalogers have 20 percent - 40 percent returns!”

- **Work with an experienced returns processing company that can refurbish your goods and return them to you.** Easley says companies like QCI can spot clean (and even dry clean) apparel, clean wet or moldy general merchandise, correct labels and repackage goods, among other tasks.



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