

TV RENTAL MAN



NEIL SOWERS

Q: What do you do?
N: I am a TV rental man.
Q: Do you watch TV?

N: Not much, I don't care for it. I do like a few specials like *Jacques Cousteau*.
Q: What kind of services do you provide?

N: Basically we provide a rental service for people typically without a set. Or a new person comes to the area who wants a set like students and professional people who move to L.A. I guess we really run the gambit—from welfare people who can only afford to make a small monthly payment rather than laying out big money, to richer people.

Q: Do they call or come in?

N: I would say that 70% of our initial contact is done on the phone. Somebody sees our ad, or a friend tells them about the possibility of TV rental. About 50% of our business is people who come in who want to see what they are getting.

Q: How many TV's do you rent monthly?

N: About 150 sets a month. There are fluctuations. The average does go up and down. If people are running specials in the retail field, it dictates some of the market. Our average customer rents for about five to six months—a person who is here temporarily or a person who rents until they get the money to buy a set or to have their set fixed.

Q: What kind of sets do you buy?

N: Black and white range in size from 14 to 21 inches. Smaller sets, the portables, are the newer sets. The larger ones, the older sets. They are so expensive to buy that in some cases you would price yourself out of the market. So you stick to the average size set. If you want a 14-inch, it is \$10 a month. If you want a 16- or 17-inch it is \$12.50. But we generally charge one price for all black and whites, it is easier. Color sets are 17 and 19 inches. We use new Japanese brands. A lot of times we pick up sets from RCA or Philco that have a lease program with hotels. After they are on three-year lease, they want to get rid of them or are converting to color. We buy the sets without too many hours on them.

Q: Do you have any remote control sets?

N: No, they are very costly. To buy a set like that and rent it, you limit business. Once you buy something like a Sony you have to get your money's worth out of it, you have to charge more. Remote controls were used, but they were lost or damaged in moving.

Q: Are there certain times when you rent?

N: Yes. Saturdays we rent a lot. Of the people who came into the office last Saturday, some came in especially to watch *Love Story*. They missed it at the movies.

Q: They have been reading their *TV Guides*.

N: Right, exactly. Or they have just been watching someone else's set.

Q: Are old people more frequent?

N: No, not so much. They tend to go out and buy things. They like to hold on to them.

Q: What other big events do people tend to rent for?

N: Generally sporting events, World Series, basketball playoffs. In fact people tend to rent a set for a season and watch it for only two or three months.

Q: What about the beginning of the season?

N: There is always a pick-up then. Anything out of the ordinary causes people to rent, specifically ecology specials, and *King Henry the Eighth*.

Q: Do you have daily rentals too?

N: Yes, for those who are having their set fixed.

Q: Do you meet any people who are frantic to get a set?

N: Yes, especially on the phone. I get some interesting people in. Like the guy who wants to watch football and has to get a little set to watch in the garage.

Q: Do you have a set?

N: Yes, at home.

Q: How did you get into doing this?

N: A girl friend of mine was renting a TV. I went away and when I came back I took the TV back so that I could study. I needed a job at the time. I said do you need anybody part-time, and they did. So I was delivering TVs for them for about a year. Then I quit school and opened up this store for them. Now I am going back to school.

Q: Do you enjoy this?

N: Yes, but it is unsettling when there is no business. The business goes up and down. You may do something one day and the next day you just sit here.

Q: What do you think about the idea of rentals in a broader perspective?

N: I was reading *Future Shock* and I can really see the rental business expanding due to the transience of people, moving around here and there.

Q: Do you take credit cards?

N: No. It gets into a big hassle.

Q: How many stores are there?

N: Four.

Q: Do you have any sales pitches or gimmicks?

N: No. If they want a TV they want a TV.

Q: How did you get the logo of a smiling king with bug eyes wearing a crown, named King Kal?

N: I would imagine the originator of the business drew that up.

Q: How long ago was that?

N: About 16 years ago, in the valley.

Q: Do people sometimes not return their sets?

N: Oh yes, sure.

Q: Do you provide TV stands?

N: For the color sets only. Most people have a place to put the sets. Anyway the stands get too banged up.

Q: Do people need credit cards if they want to rent a color set?

N: Yes. Because the sets cost \$250 to \$275 and you just can't give a set to someone without visible credit. Sometimes I rent a TV on judgment, and I have a fairly good grasp on the people who come in. If there is a doubt, I check them out. Like I just checked a fellow out this morning. Something just didn't ring about the guy and I found that he had just come through a bankruptcy. That is not to say the guy cannot pay on time. You might have trouble and you may not. It is a gamble.