

Consumer Reports Fail

Worst appeal to authority in history. Big-time Consumer Reports fail. I've highlighted the troublesome text.

Consumer Reports Fail

Facebook Algorithm Fail

The other day, Facebook suggested this page as one I might like:



Facebook algorithm fail in the extreme.

The Problems at Staples Are Not Rising Online Sales

The [March 7 New York Times included this article](#) claiming that the problems at Staples are caused by the shift to online sales:

BUSINESS DAY

Citing Shift to Online Sales, Staples Says It Will Close Up to 225 Stores by the End of 2015

By REUTERS MARCH 6, 2014

New York Times Headline

Based on my recent experience using Staples' online ordering system, I believe the problems at Staples are not rising online sales. In fact, the online ordering system was so broken that I had to place three separate telephone calls to customer service to straighten out this mess. Staples has big problems, for sure, but they start with the online ordering system. (Some of this is based on my memory of the events. I have provided as much confirmation via e-mails and the web as I have available.)

Background

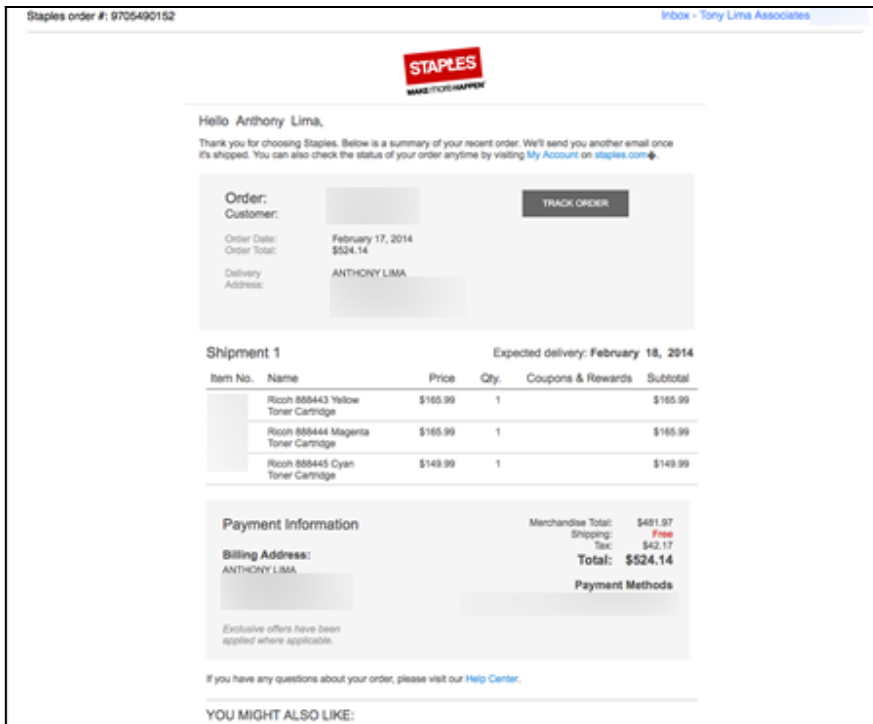
We own a [Ricoh Aficio CL7200](#) color laser printer. We bought this beast at the end of 2006. It still works wonderfully, but finding toner cartridges and other consumables has become a bit of a problem. I expected a search. What I did not expect was that the Staples ordering system would cause so much grief. (For the record, I looked at OfficeDepot.com. Their site was honest enough to tell me that what I wanted was out of stock.)



Ricoh Aficio CL7200

The printer needed a new magenta toner cartridge and yellow was getting low, too. Because the software that reports toner levels has apparently failed, I was getting erroneous reports. My lovely wife noticed that her color printing was showing defects in the red areas. Sure enough, the magenta cartridge was empty.

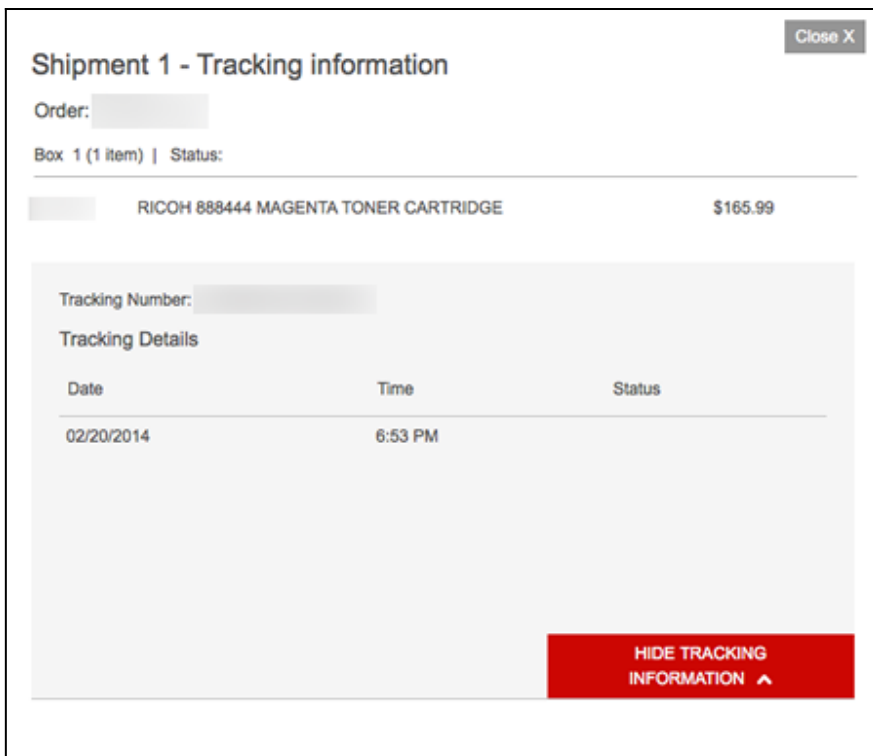
As noted earlier, I started with OfficeDepot.com. The website told me these cartridges were out of stock. **So over I went to Staples.com. I was cheerfully informed that everything was fine. I got a confirmation e-mail.** (Details in this message and others have been blurred so you can't steal my identity.)



Email Confirmation February 17, 2014

The Fun Begins

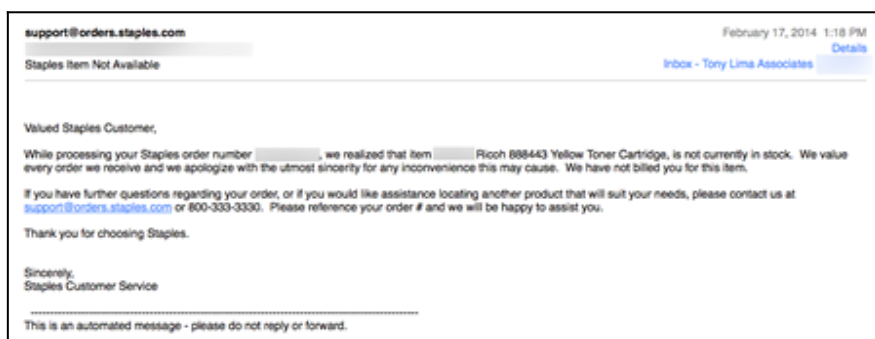
The first problem was the tracking information:



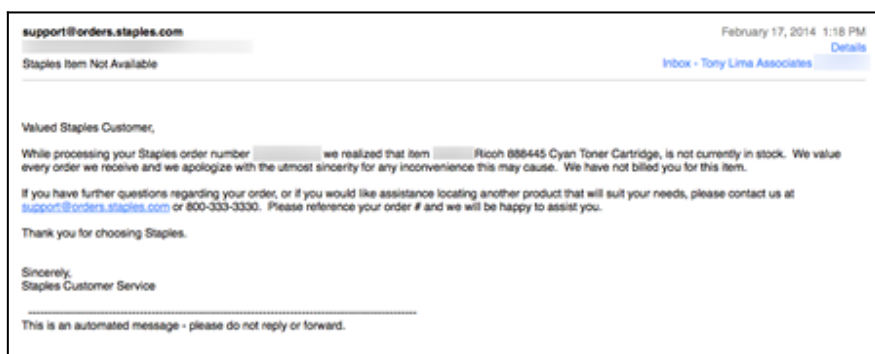
Staples Tracking Fail

There is a tracking number there, but no mention of the name of the carrier! I suppose I should have assumed UPS, but frankly the information given when you click the “Track Shipment” button should be more, um, informative.

Then the real fun started. **Later that afternoon I got two e-mails informing me that the cyan and yellow cartridges were out of stock. If you look carefully at the three e-mails below you’ll realize that Staples has access to time travel. The time on my order was 2:38 pm, but the times on their replies were both 1:18 pm.**



Email February 17, 2014 Yellow Out of Stock



Email February 17, 2014 Cyan Out of Stock

Thus began my first call to customer service. Note that the magenta cartridge was apparently in stock, so I wasn't too worried. After all, that's the one I needed most. The nice lady at customer service managed to track down a yellow cartridge somewhere. She then said she had a substitute for the cyan cartridge. I said, “Sure, ship it” while being very

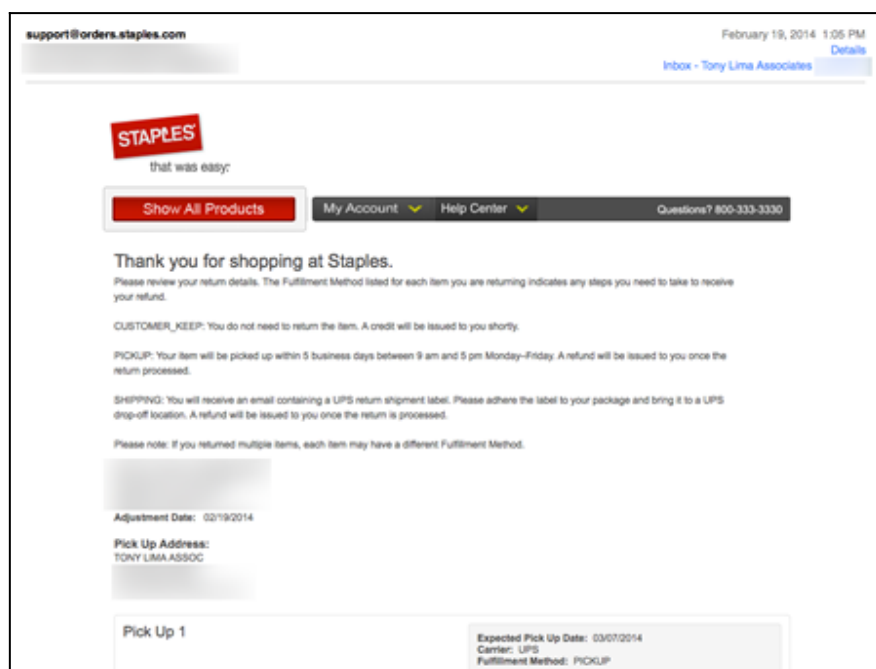
skeptical that she had, in fact, found a substitute.

A Word About Staples Customer Service

The Staples customer service representatives could not have been more helpful. They were calm, courteous, and generally knew what they were doing. It became apparent, however, that they are using parts of the same website that supports the online ordering system.

Back to the Main Story

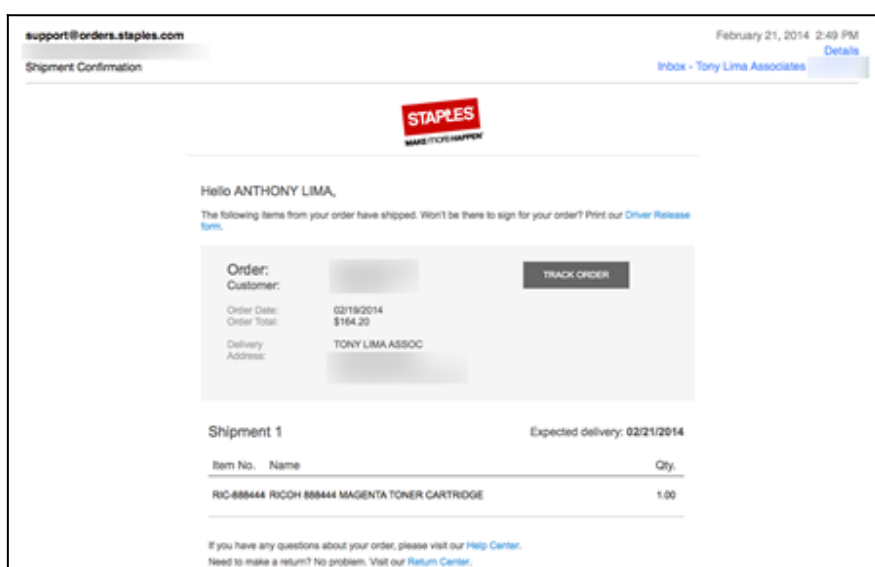
On February 19 the yellow and (allegedly) cyan cartridges arrived. Sure enough, the substitute for the cyan cartridge was not a cartridge at all. It was one of the photoconducting units. (Trust me, you don't want to know.) I went online and set up a return for that item. Note that the web page promises pickup March 7. Much to my surprise our nice UPS lady showed up February 21 asking for the box!



Email February 19, 2014 Returned Item

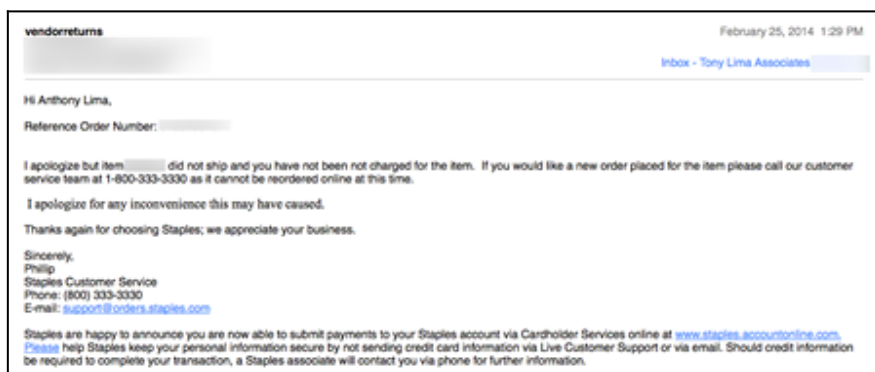
While I was there I checked the status of the magenta cartridge. Guess what? The Staples website now reported it was out of stock!

Another call to customer service. The nice lady gave me \$15 off my order. She also asked me if it would be all right to just void my original order and cut a new one for the magenta cartridge. "Sure, why not?" I replied. Later that day I got a confirmation e-mail. Take a close look at this one, too. Staples promised same-day delivery! Impressive. But untrue.



Email February 21, 2014 Magenta Shipped Again

February 25 I got yet another e-mail telling me my most recent order had not shipped.



Email February 25, 2014 Something Not

Shipped

Another call to customer service. The third nice lady managed to actually track down a magenta cartridge. It arrived a couple of days later – too late for my wife’s crash project, but at least we could use the printer again.

Conclusion

There are problems at Staples, but they begin with the online ordering system. Closing 225 stores does nothing to solve the real problem. I know it will be quite a while before I shop at Staples.com again.

Costco Fail

The latest Costco fail. I got an offer today to upgrade my account to “Executive” status. Costco knows very well that my current account has two members. See how long it takes you to spot the issue in this letter.



July 13, 2012

PERSONAL INFORMATION REMOVED

Personal information removed

Dear [REDACTED]

You've probably heard about our Executive Membership program. Perhaps you haven't upgraded because it sounded too good to be true, or because you didn't think it pertained to you.

I encourage you to reconsider. Based on your shopping history with us over the past year, you would have benefited from being an Executive Member.

Executive Members receive an annual 2% Reward of up to \$750 based on their qualified purchases at Costco. If you had been an Executive Member last year, you would be receiving a sizable Reward:

2% Reward you would have received, based on qualified spending, if you had been an Executive Member	\$82.06
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Calculated on 7/5/2012. Reward may be used toward purchases of merchandise at U.S. Costco locations. See reverse for details about the 2% Reward.

As an Executive Member, you'll also receive additional benefits and greater discounts on many Costco Services, including Travel, Identity Protection and the Costco Auto Program.

The upgrade fee is \$55 for Costco members, for a total annual membership fee of \$110. As with everything you purchase at Costco, your satisfaction is guaranteed. If you are not fully satisfied, we will refund your membership fee.

The 2% Reward will apply only to purchases made after you've upgraded to Executive Membership. So, I invite you to upgrade now so you can start accruing your 2% Reward on any new qualifying purchases and begin enjoying all of the benefits of our highest level of membership.

To upgrade, just stop by the membership counter at Costco or call 1-800-220-6000.

Sincerely,

Paul Latham
Membership, Marketing & Services
Costco Wholesale

P.S. Still not sure? Our Executive Membership specialists are ready to answer any questions you may have at 1-800-220-6000.

P.O. Box 34535, Seattle, WA 98124-1535 • 1-800-220-6000 • www.costco.com

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Costco Letter