

# WRITING SAMPLES OF TIM ERNST

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title • **Uncle Ben's International Grains Ad**

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title • **myQVC Offers Employees a Better  
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title • **Staying the Course: Maintaining the  
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# The Voice of the Customer

By Tim Ernst

In 1884 and 1885, the Home Insurance Company built a skyscraper, all 10 stories of it, in Chicago. What was remarkable about it was that this skyscraper did not rest on a firm foundation. The architects invented a new form of support. Rather than a heavy foundation and bearing walls, a steel skeleton was used and the rest of building was hung from it. They found it to be much more powerful than a solid foundation because the steel scaffolding was integral to the structure. It weaved itself through and became a part of the very structure it supported.

The same can be said about XYZ's focus on the customer. It is integral to the structure of XYZ, it supports everything the electronic retailer does, and virtually everything done within the company supports a single driving philosophy of servicing its customers. The company's foundation physically (the words Customer Focus are embedded into concrete outside its corporate headquarters in Pennsylvania), organizationally XYZ has a Customer Focus Department and historically have centered on its customers.

## A History of Responsiveness ...

XYZ is a relatively young company, 14 years, yet it has consistently ranked high in Customer Service, a leader in many polls with consumers, and compared the likes of L.L. Bean and Lands End who have been around for decades and taken years to achieve their status. "Since the beginning of XYZ we have kept the idea that we are nothing without our customers at the forefront of everything we do," states Carol Stromann, XYZ's Director of Customer Focus and point person for all customer concerns, complaints, and feedback. "We receive all sorts of feedback from the customer, anything from 'why don't you have more size 4 rings' to 'I love that program host and I wonder where she gets her hair done.' All of it is categorized and funneled to various departments," states Stromann. "Because customer focus is a company-wide value, our department often acts as the catalyst to have other departments respond to customer issues or problems," continues Stromann. "For example, let's say we begin getting calls from customers receiving the wrong color product, we can contact inventory control in the distribution center. They can check that particular product, because human error does occur, and numbers get inverted. Inventory control can fix the problem right there and stop it immediately before it effects more customers." The same response is received from Quality Assurance when a package "recipe" or how a product is packed for shipment must be modified because of reports of damage when the product is actually shipped. Although XYZ's in-house quality team rigorously tests each package; real life offers its own series of drops or shake-ups that can cause unforeseen damage.

One of the clearest examples of XYZ's cross-departmental responsiveness to customer concerns took place when a rotisserie aired and was shipped out to customers. XYZ began receiving calls that customers received the product but the metal probe was missing. XYZ checked it's inventory and found that the probe was indeed included but hidden by the packing material within the box. Customer Focus contacted Broadcasting and the next time the rotisserie was on-air, the Program Host showed how the package is received and where to find the probe. Customer Focus also made the recommendation that the vendor include a small note in the packaging indicating

where the probe is packed. By listening to the customer and responding so quickly, XYZ hopes to stop such problems before they become epidemic. "The strong relationships we have with all the other departments makes it all possible and allows us to be so responsive," explains Stromann.

## Hearing the Customer in Every Detail ...

Almost every decision or change made at XYZ is filtered through one question, "How will it affect the customer?" "We know that if we can answer that question with the response that the customer is being treated fairly, they are more likely to be a returning customer," states Stromann. This approach explains the emphasis on small details such as improving the cycle time of XYZ's return process. Quicker replacement of the product or crediting of their account equals a more satisfied customer. Once again, Stromann's department begins by gathering together the departments who can affect this process: distribution and returns, finance, even sales and marketing research. This type of continual improvement in every detail touching the customer is believed to be a large part of XYZ's success over the last 14 years. Everything from XYZ's on-air graphics to color and hem styles in clothing has been changed based on customer feedback.

Key to these changes are the Customer Service Representatives at XYZ's four call centers who regularly survey customers on what they like and don't like about a variety of topics. When XYZ tries something new, it often doesn't take long for its customers to let them know what they think -- good or bad. In May 2000, Broadcasting launched a new graphics package that made use of a black translucency in the product description area rather than the white background with black lettering viewers were accustomed to seeing. The system also allowed for more product information to be displayed. Customer feedback gather by Customer Service Representatives soon made it clear the new background had to go, yet the inclusion of more on-screen information and custom color schemes for different programs received a positive response.

Yet, actually speaking to a Customer Service Representative is only one way for customers to let XYZ know what they are thinking. Aside from formal surveys and focus groups with the advent of the Internet XYZ has expanded the options customers have to share their thoughts with the e-tailer. "You can go on the web and see the status of your order or you can call our customer service number and use our automated system to do the same status check," explains Stromann. "So if you choose to use those two means, you can get information without really talking to anybody. We're consistently trying to provide options so those customers can be in control of getting their information. People have different comfort levels with technology, many of our customers have no problem doing a live chat with our representatives through xyz.com, others email our webmaster, while still others want to talk to a representative or write a letter. Any of these ways are available for us to listen to our customer and it all comes down to the fact -- we are nothing without our customers."

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# INTRODUCING UNCLE BEN'S BRAND INTERNATIONAL BLENDS



Uncle Ben's Brand International Blends are the quality answer to the food-savvy consumer who is looking for true menu variety. The unique flavors of these grain blends add authentic ethnic tastes to any meal and the bottom line of any operator. International Blends live up to the quality you know with the name you trust-Uncle Ben's. These grain, herb and vegetable mixes can finish a meal as a sensational side dish, centerplate or complete a trendy home meal replacement. With the versatility these six blends added to your menu, your customers get what they want-variety and flavor and you gain more profit opportunities from a name you know.

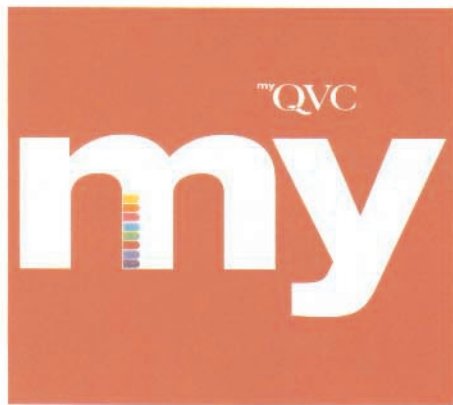
Call today to receive your free recipe booklet featuring Uncle Ben's Brand International Blends.

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## myQVC Offers Employees a Better Way to Access and Share Information

by Tim Ernst



Imagine a place where employees can access and share information pertaining to their jobs all in one location. Soon it won't be a figment of one's imagination, as QVC continues rolling out its own portal, myQVC. Ultimately providing a one-stop knowledge portal for all employees, myQVC will organize information in an easily accessible manner.

Still in its infancy, myQVC will grow and evolve as more and more areas of the company gain access and begin adding content to the site. Once you have access to myQVC, you can navigate and search for your applications, as well as create a foundation for new content. The myQVC Governance Board, a team of representatives from various business units, has been meeting weekly to outline and create how this portal will look and perform with the vast amount of information QVC generates and uses daily. "MyQVC is always evolving, its goal is to provide you with the information you need to be more effective and efficient in your job," explains myQVC Governance Board Chair and VP of Information Services **Holly Rutkowski**.

Using the QVC Business Process Model as its foundation, the Governance Board has taken the existing content of the Workspace Selector and made it available through myQVC. This is only the beginning! As the rollout continues, each business unit within QVC will be able to add its own content to myQVC with the guidance of the Governance Board. To allow for such growth, each business unit named myQVC Community Advocates. Each advocate will be given the tools to assist in building his or her community's content into myQVC.

"MyQVC Community Advocates are folks from each area of the business that are familiar with myQVC and are available to answer questions, provide tips and advise on processes used to add content to myQVC," explains Holly. "Their excitement and energy throughout the training process will hopefully spread like ripples on a pond and help make myQVC a powerful knowledge platform as the different areas learn what can be done with myQVC."

The advocates will build their communities through the use of "portlets" of content. Each portlet allows information to be viewed, accessed and even searched in a format that makes the most sense for that community. For example, if the Merchandising team wants to view a report on item productivity versus time of day it was presented, a portlet can be designed to display that information. Or if the Broadcasting team wants to create a discussion forum for new show ideas, that group can place a discussion group portlet within its community.

Helping the myQVC Community Advocates and the rest of QVC grow the portal, the myQVC Governance Board is in place:

### myQVC Governance Board:

**Holly Rutkowski**, Information Services, Chair  
**Allison Collins**, Customer Service  
**Debbie Cannova**, Distribution  
**Tim Ernst**, Internal Communication  
**Diane Donio**, HRD&T  
**Marilyn Montross**, Merchandising & Supply Chain  
**James Wisdom**, QVC.com  
**Chris Frey**, MR&SA  
**Ginger March**, Creative Services  
**Kent Stueve**, Information Technology  
**Mike Fleck**, Information Technology  
**Jean Fisher**, Information Services  
**Sandra Schock**, Information Services  
**Robert Loncaric**, Broadcasting  
**Craig Kiester**, Finance  
**Darren McManus**, Information Technology - UK  
**Boas Simon**, Information Technology - DE

"As I've told the Governance Board and the Community Advocates, myQVC is ever-evolving and if it looks the same next year, we've failed," explains Holly. "I'm confident that like other innovative ideas at QVC, it will quickly be embraced throughout the organization as a better way to work and share information."

The myQVC Governance Board is interested to know what you think of the new portal. Please use the Governance Board feedback portlet to share your thoughts and suggestions to help myQVC evolve.

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# Staying the Course:

## Maintaining the Quality of QVC's Benefits in the Rising Waters of Healthcare Costs

The sea of benefit plans is vast and turbulent. Rising prescription costs\* and rapidly increasing hospital and other health care costs mean health care insurance providers are paying more.

Take, for example, Independence Blue Cross and its affiliates, which have seen a 78 percent increase in drug benefit costs over the last five years, spending over \$1 billion in 2002 alone. This has a ripple effect on the employer paying more and eventually the employees picking up more of the costs.

"We're seeing double-digit inflation in health care costs," states Director of Human Resources Administration **Paul Antony**. "We saw this type of inflation in the '80s and saw similar reactions then too." The "reactions" Paul is speaking about are the quick fixes some companies make in the name of reducing the benefit costs to the company and employees.

"There are no quick fixes to the health care cost dilemma," explains Senior Vice President Human Resources **Tom Clardy**. "Many organizations have changed plans and established flexible benefit plans and defined contribution medical accounts in order to reduce the cost of the benefits to the organization. These plans generally shift more of the cost to the employee and ultimately don't save money, but just change the burden to the employee."

The current trend in the industry is to move to defined contribution accounts, which work by giving each employee a number of credits based on their salary level. "The employees can use these credits to pay for their health care needs until they run out," adds Paul. "Then the employee must pay out-of-pocket until the costs hit a threshold where

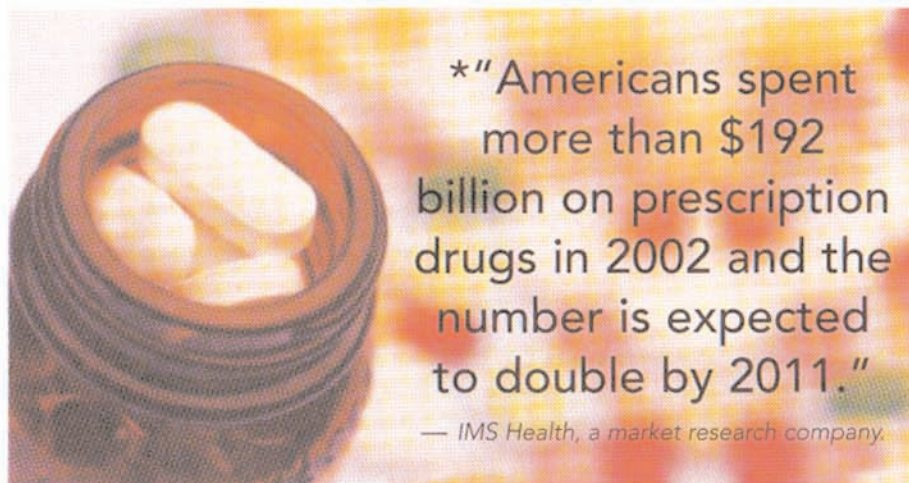
continues. "It's in contradiction to the entire Living Healthy and Wellness program we promote here at QVC."

"That's why we are staying the course and currently not changing the plans available to QVC employees," states Tom. "While other plans are getting a lot of attention they do not match the coverage offered by our PPO (Preferred Provider Organization) & HMO (Health Maintenance Organization) plans. Using the Independence Blue Cross network gives us the best overall value for the money spent on healthcare and does not shift an unreasonable burden on to employees."

While Tom and Paul admit their team is constantly on the lookout to better the plans and reduce costs, they won't make a change for the sake of making one. According to Tom, "Paul's team conducts an ongoing review of our benefits and is always looking for innovations to improve our plans or reduce the cost."

Currently, the team finds the PPO and HMO plans QVC offers provide among the widest choice of providers and lowest payment thresholds available. Tom says, "Our plans remain strong choices and a good value for our employees and our company."

By Tim Ernst



**\*"Americans spent more than \$192 billion on prescription drugs in 2002 and the number is expected to double by 2011."**

— IMS Health, a market research company.

the insurance company picks up 100 percent of the costs. The problem is the gap between where the credits run out and where the provider picks up the costs can be quite wide. The end result is the employee pays even more out-of-pocket in a given year than they did before the plan.

"What ends up happening is employees start to avoid using their credits at the sake of their own health, until a problem has escalated enough that the insurer will pick up the entire cost," Paul