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3 April Fools' Pranks From Earlier, More Trusting Times

April Fools' Day isn't what it used to be. Sure, it's still a fun distraction, with Google announcing "scratch and sniff" digital technology and Amazon declaring new features enabling Alexa to understand your pets. But it's pretty hard for anyone to genuinely pull your leg in the internet age.

Back when you couldn't debunk a hoax with a simple Snopes search, things were a little more interesting. Here are a few of the most hilarious — yet somehow convincing — April Fools' pranks in history.

Nixon for President, 1992

When NPR's popular "Talk of the Nation" program announced in 1992 that former President Richard Nixon had announced his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination, listeners were shocked. Never mind that he'd been the center of the largest presidential scam in history, but his campaign slogan, "I never did anything wrong, and I won't do it again," left something to

be desired. NPR even brought political experts on the show to discuss the ramifications of such a move, and listeners flooded the station with outraged calls — until host John Hockenberry revealed that the on-air Nixon was actually comedian Rich Little.

Swiss Spaghetti Growers Enjoy Record Harvest

Ah, to be as naive as we were during the early days of television. In 1957, a BBC news show called "Panorama" conducted a special report on a massive spaghetti harvest in Ticino, Switzerland, following a remarkably mild winter. The black and white images showed farmers pulling huge strands of noodles off tall trees and prompted hundreds of viewers to call into the station and ask how they might procure their own spaghetti tree.

Thomas Edison's Amazing Food Machine

When Edison was in his prime, Americans truly believed he could accomplish anything — even



a machine that transformed air, water, and dirt into biscuits, vegetables, meat, and wine, as reported by the New York Daily Graphic in 1878. The article was reprinted in newspapers across the country. Thousands of people bought the trick. When Buffalo's Commercial Advertiser ran an editorial on Edison's genius in the endeavor, the Graphic reprinted it in full, along with the headline, "They Bite!"

A TOWERING TALE

THE STRANGE CASE OF MYSTERIOUS MOLD

When you're renovating a building, the last thing you want to find is mold. And when you have tenants living there full time — particularly tenants who may be susceptible to greater health risks — you *definitely* don't want to find mold. A luxury senior living center in a large South Texas city found themselves in this situation, and they wanted to determine what went wrong and how they could fix it.

A few months ago, a company I work for as a subcontractor sent me out to answer these questions. The 19-story center was in the process of removing old vinyl wallpaper from the second floor interior hallways when they discovered mold growing beneath the wallpaper. Going in, I had two jobs. First, I needed to come up with the scope of work for mold remediation so the client could find a contractor to remove the mold. Then I needed to determine why mold was growing in the corridors to begin with.

This building presented an interesting challenge. I could understand mold growing on the inside surface of exterior walls, but finding mold on the interior hallway walls was a bit strange. There had been no water leaks, and based on the pattern of growth — beginning at the floor with columns of mold stretching to the ceiling every few feet — I could tell the mold hadn't been caused by custodians using too much water when mopping. Solving this puzzle required other skills developed over years of training.

After assessing the situation, I was able to determine "stack effect" was to blame. Sometimes called "chimney effect," the problem occurs when warm air rises inside a building. Hot air is forced out of the



"Solving this puzzle required other skills developed over years of training"

building at upper floors, and this results in the building sucking cold air in at the lower floors. In South Texas, you always have 20–25 mph winds blowing off the Gulf of Mexico, which affects the air movement in the building. In this case, if you stood by the entrance door and opened it just a crack, stack effect within the building pulled the outdoor air past the door with such force that it felt like a wind storm. This often explains why a resident living on the second floor is always cold, no matter how high they turn up the heat. Meanwhile, someone on the 19th floor of the condominiums never has to turn on their heat in the winter.

The shifting air pressure of stack effect doesn't cause mold, but if a building isn't properly sealed, it can draw up moisture

between the floors. Following a hunch, we had some ceiling tiles removed from the first floor ceiling and found pipes penetrating the slab (floor) of the second floor, exactly where the tall columns of mold grew.

Knowing how the problem originated, it was easy to test and prove air leaks as the source of the mold they were experiencing. We then offered suggestions to the property manager to keep the mold from returning.

This was one of the more unusual and challenging projects we've had in a while, and it was fun to investigate. Also, it's nice to know all my years of training and experience still come in handy for my commercial building clients!

Train West

HANDLING NEGATIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Though many people are quick to say failure is not an option, it doesn't make a lot of sense. If we never failed at anything, how would we learn from our mistakes? Mistakes create the building blocks to success — it might be rough and bumpy, but we learn and move forward. It's the same when you find an angry customer on your hands. You can use the opportunity to learn and make sure their next experience is better.

How do you handle a mistake? First, don't point fingers. If a customer wasn't satisfied with their interaction with your business, own up to it. When you try to defend yourself, it creates more issues. The customer wants the problem resolved. They don't care about the reason you failed.

Approach the problem with an open mind and calm demeanor. Let the customer know that you are sorry for your mistake, and be empathetic. As a bonus, offer them a free coupon of some kind to entice the customer to come back to your company. It shows that you are truly sorry for what they went through.

Facing negative feedback through online reviews can be tricky. It can feel as though they'll make or break your company. This, similar to talking to an angry customer, depends on how you handle the situation. One option is to focus on getting the review removed. If you have proof that the review is untrue, this may be possible. However, if the review is correct, addressing it as politely and calmly as you can will be the best approach. Let them know you are aware of the problem and that it's being addressed.

Everyone makes mistakes, but it's how we fix and learn from our mistakes that shows our true colors. Showing your customers you are able to handle mistakes will leave a far more lasting impression than the mistake ever will.

Someone to Support You

Melissa Helmick, Regional Sales Manager, EMSL Analytical, Inc.



EMSL Analytical, Inc. is the nation's leading environmental testing firm. Our network of laboratories stretches from coast to coast across the United States and Canada, providing analytical testing for commercial, industrial, regulator, and law enforcement clients. We conduct testing for environmental investigation focused on indoor air quality, lead paint, microbiology, environmental chemistry, asbestos, food testing, and industrial hygiene.

This is work I find infinitely fascinating, but you won't find me in a lab. I act as sales manager for EMSL Analytical's West, Midwest, South, and Southeast regions. My job is to ensure our sales teams are able to provide the best customer service to our clients. Many times, this includes helping clients broaden their horizons by teaching them what kind of service we can provide and how this service is beneficial to them. Much of the work we do involves indoor air quality, and when it comes to educating people on the importance of IAQ, there's no one better than Travis West and Building Air Quality.

Travis and I have known each other for 20 years after crossing paths at the Indoor Air Quality Association, a nonprofit dedicating to helping solve indoor environmental problems. We worked together before I came to EMSL Analytical, and Travis has always been one of the most knowledgeable people I know in our field. He's a very well-rounded person whose ability to see a situation from all angles makes him an excellent problem solver. Plus, he's the most candid person you'll ever meet. You'll always know where you stand with Travis, and these traits meant Travis went from being a client to a mentor to one of my good friends.

Having someone like Travis on your team is a tremendous benefit. Travis supported me when I ran for the IAQA's executive board. I ended up becoming the first woman on the board, and Travis' advice has helped me many more times over the years. He's the kind of person who'll tell you what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong, and he'll be there when you need someone to say, "I believe in you." As a business colleague and a personal friend, I'm proud to have someone like Travis in my life.

Proactive Intervention Prevents Escalation

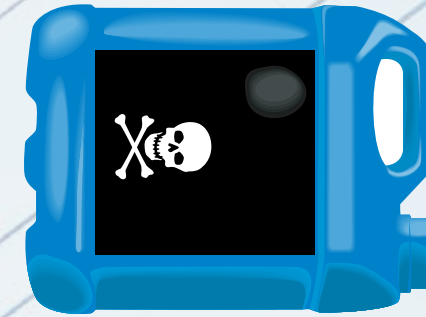
What's Antifreeze Doing in Your Building?

Some time ago, our team was called to the 13th floor of an office building. The receptionist reported smelling a sweet chemical-like odor a few times every week. The scent was so powerful that it made her physically ill. Since she was the first person most people met when they set foot on the floor, everyone who came by could hear her concerns regarding the IAQ of the building.

When one of the company mechanics stopped by, she made a point to ask him about the odor. After hearing her description but not experiencing the smell for himself, the mechanic said, "You are probably smelling antifreeze. That's something that should never be in a commercial office building."

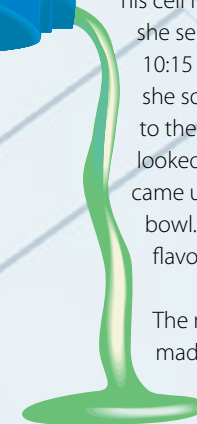
Understandably, this upset the receptionist even more. Fortunately, the building manager reacted quickly to these complaints and called us. We looked at the HVAC systems, reviewed outside air deliveries, checked custodial chemicals, and collected background readings of general air quality. Nothing unusual came up. At the same time, the HSE (Health, Safety, and Environmental Department) for the tenant ran their own investigation. They conducted expensive tests but also reported "no problem found."

Though both investigations found no cause for concern, a mysterious smell was still making the receptionist feel sick. This had the potential to become a real problem for the building owner. Suggestion is a powerful thing. Researcher James Pennebaker, Ph.D., of the University of Texas at Austin put it nicely: "If a visitor sits on your sofa, and you say, 'My dog has fleas,' watch them start scratching." It doesn't matter



if there are no fleas; just a suggestion can convince the brain there's a problem. Likewise, if a receptionist tells people antifreeze in the building is making her sick, how long do you think it will be before other people feel sick, too?

Rather than close the book on the case and let her keep complaining with no solution, Travis West gave the receptionist his cell number. He instructed her to call him the next time she sensed the odor. Within two days, he received a call at 10:15 a.m. The receptionist said the odor was terrible, and she sounded so sick she could barely talk. Rushing down to the building, Travis searched through the floor area and looked for where the smell was strongest. As he did, he came upon a woman who was getting up to wash a dirty bowl. She'd just finished eating her breakfast of maple-flavored oatmeal.



The receptionist identified the scent as the odor that made her sick. Sure enough, each time the woman made her oatmeal breakfast in the office break room, the receptionist became ill from the smell. The receptionist isn't the only person to find the sweet smell of maple flavoring unbearable. Since then, we have received several similar complaints related to this breakfast cereal, and we're now able to identify the source far quicker.

While building owners and property managers should respond quickly to complaints, it's important that tenants be aware that IAQ is a shared responsibility. Be sure to provide your tenants with guidance on what they should and should not do in their shared space and how they can avoid inadvertently causing an IAQ concern.

And maybe don't stock the break room with maple-flavored oatmeal.



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