In a recent issue of my Advertising Letter I explained the concept of “preemptive advertising.” In a nutshell, you can obtain a preemptive advantage by being the first in your product category to claim credit for all the behind-the-scenes details of your product or service.

I give as an example a brewery that took consumers step by step through the intricate process it uses to make its beer. It’s the same process used by its competitors, but the competitors had never bothered to explain it to the beer-buying public. As a result, the brewery, Schlitz, achieved a huge competitive marketplace advantage.

Let’s apply this concept to a Los Angeles retailer of which I am a regular customer. Ralphs is a very large supermarket chain. During the past year it’s added something to some of its stores that I find rather interesting; a pharmacy. Here are some of the reasons I’ve switched from the drugstore I’d been using to Ralphs’ pharmacy:

• Convenience. I often have to go to Ralphs anyway, because that’s where I buy groceries. The pharmacy is open seven days a week, and I can drop off a prescription at the pharmacy, buy my groceries, then pick up the prescription when I’m done.

• Speed. If I don’t have shopping to do but instead have to wait for the prescription to be filled, it takes the pharmacist only 10 minutes or so. That’s half the wait time of the big pharmacy I had been using.

• Personal service. I can actually reach a pharmacist by telephone. I don’t know what it’s like where you live, but if you call most Los Angeles pharmacies, you either go through automation hell (“Press if you’re in a life-threatening situation that requires immediate medication”), or you’re expected to wait on hold for a few hours. At Ralphs you have the option of requesting a prescription renewal simply by inputting your prescription number with your telephone keypad, or you can speak to a live human being. When opting for a human, I don’t think I’ve ever been on hold for more than one minute.

• Courtesy. Simply put, courtesy is an endangered species at Los Angeles pharmacies. On the phone or in person, the folks at my Ralphs pharmacy are polite to customers.

During a recent visit (where I got a flu shot for $10 — what a great way to draw customers into the store), I asked the pharmacist a few quick questions — what a great way to draw customers into the store — about the professional qualifications of the pharmacists’ employees. They also demonstrate problem-solving by pointing out that the customer will save time by using Ralphs’ pharmacies, anticipate objections and explain why and how the customer will save time at Ralphs.

Would any of these spots motivate you to consider leaving your current pharmacy?

**RALPHS “ANTIGRAVITY”**

**ANNOUNCER:** To become a Ralphs pharmacist, you’ve got to be a pretty special person. First, you have to successfully complete a four-year bachelor of science program. Then it’s four more years of school to get your doctorate in pharmacology. Once you pass our admittedly still professional and educational requirements, you’ll face the most important test of all...

**PHARMACIST:** With this medication, it’s very important that you take it before meals.

**WOMAN:** How much before?

**PHARMACIST:** Not more than 30 minutes. The easiest thing to do is just swallow one of these with a glass of water right before you take your first bite of food.

**WOMAN:** (Looking up) People will think I’m a pill-popper.

**PHARMACIST:** Tell them it’s a reverse antigravity pill and that if you don’t take one with every meal, you’ll float away.

**WOMAN:** Ooh, I like that...

**ANNOUNCER:** The job of a Ralphs pharmacist is not simply to dispense medicines, it’s to help people — with information, advice and a genuine concern for the customer’s well-being.

**PHARMACIST:** Remember, one pill before every meal for the next three days.

**ANNOUNCER:** Your nearby Ralphs pharmacist is ready to help you. Reverse antigravity pills not available in all areas.

**RALPHS “WORRY”**

**WOMAN:** When I heard I could get all my prescriptions filled while doing my grocery shopping at Ralphs, it sounded like a good idea. But two things worried me. One was that Ralphs is a big supermarket — great prices, huge selection. But what do they know about filling prescriptions? Turns out all of Ralphs’ pharmacists have bachelor of science degrees and doctor of pharmacology degrees. That’s eight years’ training before they can even apply for a pharmacist’s job at Ralphs. My other concern was that... oops, my prescription is ready! Gotta go!

**RALPHS “WORRY NO. 2”**

**WOMAN:** When they put a fully stocked pharmacy inside my local Ralphs supermarket, it sounded like a great idea. Do my grocery shopping while my prescription is filled. But I worried that it would be a hassle to transfer all my prescriptions from my old pharmacy to Ralphs. Here’s how hard that was: I called the Ralphs pharmacy nearest me and asked them to handle everything. And they did. Now I hand them my prescription, and it’s ready in about 10 minutes — before I’ve even finished my shopping. Ralphs supermarket — they fill my prescriptions while I shop for groceries. I like that idea!