

Now, having said all of this, I must nevertheless admit that if someone were to go in on any particular day and visit some one of our stores, or any number probably, he might find a few items on which the price in one store is not the same as in another store, and it may not be explained by one of these two exceptions which I have mentioned. What then is the reason? Let me tell you.

Some of you may not realize it, but price marking for supermarkets, speaking as a former store manager, is a tremendous, difficult, and tedious job. It requires the constant attention of district managers, field specialists, auditors, and we have, unknown to our store employees and managers, shoppers who visit our stores, check prices, not only do they check prices, they check quality, service, friendliness, cleanliness, many other items. We have regular auditing crews that check prices unknown, unannounced price checks. In a highly competitive business like ours, the correct price on the merchandise is an absolute must.

Now, our pricing has to cover somewhere between 7,000 and 8,000 different items, and each store, assuming we will carry 40 pieces of each item, that means that there has to be a price mark put on approximately 300,000 individual pieces of merchandise in each and every store.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. That is not the case at any one time; that is a cumulative total?

Mr. O'NEAL. That's right. That's an estimate of how many individual pieces of salable merchandise are in this supermarket.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. And you might have months to do that?

Mr. O'NEAL. That's correct, but it still has to be done and we are assuming that everything should be right all the time, so there are 300,000 pieces of merchandise out there that we would like to say are 100 percent accurately price marked.

Then to complicate the matter more, there is the problem of price fluctuations. Food prices are highly sensitive to market conditions. They will vary in direct relationship to supply and demand. Every time the price on a particular item does change, we must mark this change on every piece of that item in every one of our stores. This is carried out physically by the people working in each store, anywhere from 25 up to a hundred persons, under the direction of the store manager and his assistants. Now, I leave it to any fairminded person, and I have heard this comment today about human error, and we are constantly working on it, and I might just interject here, I read the newspaper from cover to cover, and the Post-Dispatch I think is one of the finest newspapers in the country, but where do all of the typographical errors come from? Does the machine make these errors?

Mr. ROSENTHAL. From those well-paid typographers.

Mr. O'NEAL. That's right. These are human errors.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. The only difference is that typographical errors in newspapers don't cost anyone money.

Mr. O'NEAL. Except I pay for the paper and I can't read the article. I have seen some errors that have cost people money, and I'm not indicating the Post-Dispatch. It happens to every newspaper, but it is a human error.

With so many people involved, we cannot prevent the mistakes of human error. We constantly work on this, but of this one point I'm sure: If you had a staff large enough to examine each and every price