A West Texas cowboy was tending his herd in a remote pasture when suddenly a brand-new BMW advanced out of a dust cloud towards him. The driver, a young man in a Brioni suit, Gucci shoes, Ray-Ban sunglasses and YSL tie, leans out the window and asks the cowboy, "If I tell you exactly how many cows and calves you have in your herd, will you give me a calf?"

The cowboy looks at the man, obviously a yuppie, then looks at his peacefully grazing herd and calmly answers, "Sure, why not?"

The yuppie parks his car, whips out his Dell notebook computer, connects it to his AT&T cell phone, and surfs to a NASA page on the Internet, where he calls up a GPS satellite navigation system to get an exact fix on his location, which he then feeds to another NASA satellite that scans the area in an ultra-high resolution photo. The young man then opens the digital photo in Adobe Photoshop and exports it to an image processing facility in Hamburg, Germany.

Within seconds, he receives an email on his Palm Pilot that the image has been processed and the data stored. He then accesses a MS-SQL database through an ODBC connected Excel spreadsheet with email on his Blackberry and, after a few minutes, receives a response.

Finally, he prints out a full-color, 150-page report on his hi-tech, miniaturized HP LaserJet printer and finally turns to the cowboy and says, "You have exactly 1,586 cows and calves."

"That's right. Well, I guess you can take one of my calves," says the cowboy. He watches the young man select one of the animals and looks on amused, as the young man stuffs it into the trunk of his car.

Then the cowboy says to the young man, "Hey, if I can tell you exactly what your business is, will you give me back my calf?"

The young man thinks about it for a second and then says, "Okay, why not?"

"You're a Congressman for the US Government." says the cowboy.

"Wow! That's correct," says the yuppie, "but how did you guess that?"

"No guessing required," answered the cowboy. "You showed up here even though nobody called you; you want to get paid for an answer I already knew, to a question I never asked.

You tried to show me how much smarter than me you are; and you don't know a thing about cows.............. Now give me back my dog and get outta here!"

Whether we like it or not, government does impact our lives and the lives of our customers. One thing you can do is make sure your store is in position to take advantage of new regulations.

For instance, the EPA now has rules for contractors performing work which disturbs lead-based paint in homes, child care facilities, and schools built before 1978. These rules require contractors to use supplies commonly sold in hardware stores. You and your staff should know these rules and make sure you are suggesting the required items needed to be in compliance.

Meanwhile, as of April 1, 2011 all three-family and larger buildings in Wisconsin that have attached garages or “fuel burning devices”-gas heat, oil heat, gas dryers, gas stoves, etc.-are required to have carbon monoxide detectors. What’s more, beginning February, 2011, Wisconsin will require carbon monoxide detectors be installed in virtually ALL one- and two-family dwellings, including owner occupied. Are you aware of the new requirements? Are your customers? Stock up now, and promote the new rules and regulations early and often in your store and to your customers.