



## Anybody Seen My Pen?

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Every once in a while, I encounter a business policy so astonishing that, no matter how small or inconsequential, I end up musing about it for days. Recently, I was in a regional brand Mexican food joint, and I paid with plastic. I looked for a way to sign the receipt thrust at me by the cashier, and was shocked by what I saw on the counter: a construction-grade chain so heavy and huge, it rendered the pen nearly unusable.

Everyone with a cash register and a credit card machine encounters the same problem – pen thieves! You bulk up at Staples on pens, and they are gone in less than a week. You attach your pen to a string, and the string breaks or the pen cartridge runs out. You and your employees constantly fumble to find where the pen at the register went, while customers stand there and stare at you wide-eyed.

Like it or not, *you* buy ‘em and *they* take ‘em. Unless there is a rampant black market for used pens, I think the habit of using a pen and then mindlessly putting it into our pocket or purse afflicts almost all of us. But attaching a chain large enough to secure a bull in heat is not only a terribly impractical solution, it looks ridiculous.

Now, if you’ve lived in Baltimore for the last 5 years or so, chances are you’ve at one point or another encountered this pen in your travels:



I’ve never needed bail, knock on wood. I don’t know anyone who works at Big Boyz Bail Bonds. I’ve never seen them at Artscape handing out the pens, and

I can tell you for sure that I’ve never purchased one of these pens. And yet, I see them *everywhere*, from the counter at my local Royal Farms store, to the spare pen in my glove box, to the pen cup on my boss’s desk. Pens float. They travel. You pick them up, carry them from place to place, use them, lose them, give them away, and then find another.

So, what’s the point here? Well, back to my friends here at Typical Mexican Chain Restaurant. This was not just one managers’ clever solution – it appears to be policy since I’ve seen it at more than one location. It is pretty clear they’ve lost a lot of pens, enough to justify their monstrosity of a chain at the counter. Equally clear, their strategy for fixing this problem is flawed. Come on, people: If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!

Instead of being concerned every time another absentminded customer walks out the door with the pen *du jour*, why not invest in (drum roll, please) branded pens! Big Boyz Bail Bonds has washed the city with their branding, instilling their catchy name in the minds of thousands of people otherwise uninterested in bail bonds. If your customers are going to walk away with your stuff anyway, why not make sure they are taking your branding with them?